“NOBLES AND BARONS OF THE COURT OF HEAVEN”:
A SURVEY OF ANGELOLOGY FROM THE PATRISTIC ERA TO THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS
GIVEN TO JONATHAN EDWARDS

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Dustin Wayne Benge
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“NOBLES AND BARONS OF THE COURT OF HEAVEN”:
A SURVEY OF ANGEOLOGY FROM THE PATRISTIC ERA TO THE
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Dustin Wayne Benge

Read and Approved by:

__________________________________________
Michael A.G. Haykin (Chair)

__________________________________________
Joseph C. Harrod

__________________________________________
Donald S. Whitney

Date ______________________________
For my Dad and Mom, who trained me to love our Lord.

For Molli, in whom I have found favor from our Lord.
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PREFACE

The arduous process of writing a dissertation is one of the most intimidating tasks an individual can undertake. While it is grueling, it also unveils the life, mind, and discipline of a maturing scholar. It pushes the life to the point of exhaustion, the mind to its deepest intellectual endeavor, and discipline at the price of all other things until it is complete. While the process and completion reveal an individual that realizes he knows far less than when he first began, it also reveals a cloud of supporting witnesses, without whose support, prayers, and encouragement, the task would have proven impossible.

First, I want to thank my doctoral advisor, Michael A.G. Haykin. Since I first met him while I was an M.Div. student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Michael Haykin has been an incalculable influence in my life. The countless hours he has poured into my life, both intellectually and spiritually, will never be forgotten, and will be adequately revealed only in heaven. His passion for church history and biblical spirituality is infectious and constantly drives me to academic and spiritual excellence. It was in multiple conversations with him that this dissertation took shape and now sees fruition.

Second, I owe immense gratitude to Steven J. Lawson, my pastor, mentor, and friend. I began this dissertation while employed at OnePassion Ministries. Dr. Lawson allowed me time away from other tasks to pursue this project and pastorally encouraged me in the journey.

Third, I must acknowledge my family and friends. I owe an incalculable debt of thankfulness to my parents, Wayne and Vera Benge, for supporting and encouraging me throughout my academic endeavors. They constantly remind me of my calling into gospel ministry and challenge me to pursue that calling with every ounce of God-given fervor. I also want to thank Dustin Bruce, whose unceasing support from the beginning of
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Fifth, I owe heartfelt thankfulness to my wife, Molli. From the day I took my entrance exams into the Ph.D. program, when we were not yet married, to the completion of this dissertation, Molli has stood as a stalwart beside me, cheering and urging me to continue in this seemingly overwhelming endeavor. She has been my constant, and without her, this dissertation would not exist. I will be forever indebted to her love, kindness, and patience.

Preeminently, I am nothing without the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in pursuit of him and the glory of God that I strive.

Dustin Benge

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2018
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The angels and saints make up but one family, though members of a different character; as in one royal house there is the queen, the children, the barons, etc. He is the head of all the rational creation; saints and angels are united in Christ, and have communion in him.\(^1\)

Jonathan Edwards

 Angels were scarce in eighteenth-century Calvinistic New England. Being part of the biblical panoply, the Puritans certainly did not ignore the supernatural, but the subject of angels had long fallen out of fashion. In fact, the worldview of eighteenth-century Britain and its American colonies differed greatly from the worldview of modernity. David Hall writes, “The people of eighteenth-century New England lived in an enchanted universe. Theirs was a world of wonders.”\(^2\) Theologians, poets, writers, and the great intellectual thinkers of the eighteenth-century world reported the sightings of ghosts, ominous comets in the heavens, visions of armies and ships floating in the air, angels standing at the bedside of the sick and infirmed, demons appearing as black bears or black dogs, voices and music from invisible sources, and devils carrying men into hell.\(^3\) The eighteenth-century world was occupied with both the mystical and metaphysical. In many respects, this was a world that harkened back to medieval times filled with elements of pagan pantheism, Spiritism, astrology, ancient cosmology, and ignorance of

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\(^3\) Hall, *World of Wonder*, 71-80.
true science. However, not all wonders were considered equal. Belief in miracles was not popular in eighteenth-century Protestant thought. The Puritans mutually agreed that the age of miracles had ceased with the closing chapter of Scripture, and they relied instead on the centrality of the biblical text.\(^4\) The Puritans looked to God’s providences in the world for guidance and knowledge, but they differentiated between those wonders, which they saw as emanating directly from God, and miracles, as in the Roman Catholic tradition, which they deduced as human or diabolical manipulations, not the work of God’s divine goodness.\(^5\)

Among their vast corpus of sermons, tracts, sermons, and writings, the Puritans seldom mention the subject of angels. When mentioned, it was done so with a great deal of trepidation and used only in the regular sermonic exposition of Scripture. Rarely did they engage in what contemporary theologians call “angelology.”\(^6\) The Puritans cautiously avoided the “magical” or “mechanical” worldview, but rather sought to foster a God-centered worldview.\(^7\) The Puritans focused upon God, law, and gospel, not upon created spirits.

A rediscovery of the contribution of the writings of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) on the subject of angels propels him into the category of one of the most important thinkers on the subject of angels and demons within the Christian tradition. Scattered throughout his entire corpus “is the equivalent of an entire book on this topic.”\(^8\)


writings and miscellaneous musings of Jonathan Edwards about the angelic has escaped notice among his future students. Even with the resurgence of Edwards’ scholarship in the past two decades, his biblical and theological comments on the angelic realm have been absent. While Edwards never constructed a systematic angelology, he wrote on the subject in nearly fifty entries in his varied collection of *Miscellanies* and alluded to the subject in multiple sermons and treatises.

For Edwards, the angelic realm is to be considered and observed as a corollary of Christology. Karl Rahner agreed with Edwards when he wrote, “Angelology . . . can only ultimately be understood as an inner element of Christology.” Edwards great interest lay in the mission and function of the angels within the context of redemptive history, and at most every point his references to angels occur alongside references to Christ. Edwards’ angelology was traditional in its focus on the three standard medieval themes of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels. Rather than assigning the angels to an unknown celestial realm, Edwards conceived the angels as human-like in their capacity for surprise, outrage, temptation, joy, wonder, growth, perseverance, and development. According to Edwards, God created two worlds that correspond to the two orders of creatures: one for humanity and one for angels. While the lower world of humanity is corruptible, and the upper world of angels is incorruptible, both are mutable.

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12 David Keck writes that for the medievals, “The three events of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels . . . constitute the essential point of departure for understanding the angels.” David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.

Angels and humans were two parts of one society in heaven that was itself an eternally progressive state. This overarching progressive state can be subdivided into three eras in the history of heaven: (1) from creation to Christ’s ascension; (2) from Christ’s ascension to consummation; and (3) from consummation to eternity. Within these three eras, according to Edwards, angels surface as primary characters on the stage of God’s eternal plan.

**Thesis**

This dissertation seeks to introduce and examine the angelology of Jonathan Edwards as a continuation of the angelology delineated in the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Puritan eras. The corpus of Jonathan Edwards contains many reflections on the heavenly realm of the elect and fallen angels. For Edwards, the angelic realm is to be investigated and viewed as a corollary of Christology. His great interest lay in the mission and function of angels within redemptive history within the three eras in the history of heaven and the three standard medieval themes of creation, fall, and confirmation.

**Background**

**Familiarity with the Literature**

In the 1990s alone, more than four hundred works were cataloged and published on angels. While a few of these works are scholarly attempts at understanding angels, most are not. At the turn of the century, great interest arose in the theological writings of

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Jonathan Edwards. However, except for a few works, the writings of Edwards on the theme of angels has gone virtually unnoticed within the academic and scholarly community.

Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott’s *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* is a helpful contribution to Edwards studies. The particular chapter within this work, “The Angels in the Plan of Salvation,” is one of the only examinations of angels within the corpus of Edwards. McClymond and McDermott provide historical context, biblical evidence, and theological understanding of Edwards’ musings on the celestial realm. McClymond and McDermott marry Edwards’ writings on angels with his Christology and demonstrate the two are inseparable in the mind of this New England Puritan.

Historian Harry S. Stout addresses the subject of angels in the “Editor’s Introduction” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* published by Yale University. Stout points out that Edwards’ reflections in a sermon series between March and August 1739, constitute “a vast apparatus of reflection” on the subject of redemptive history. Stout comments, “This Work of Redemption is so much the greatest of all the works of God, that all other works are to be looked upon either as part of it, or appendages to it, or are some way reducible to it.” During this period, many sermons preached by Edwards were directly and indirectly influenced by the themes he developed within this redemption discourse, and can be summarized under the headings “Heaven,” “Earth,” and “Hell.” When Edwards assumed principal involvement in the Great Awakening, he drew on these categories to understand the significance of the revivals and to frame his sermons. While


this series of sermons were grounded upon earth, Edwards always started with heaven: the creation of the angels, and the eternal communications of the Trinity. While transcending formal theology, heaven placed the ordinary person on a level with the most advanced academic. Angels appear repeatedly as central characters in the tri-world narrative of Edwards. In his sermons, Edwards repeated themes he first recorded privately in his “Miscellanies,” reminding his hearers that the creating heaven was in order to the Work of Redemption; it was to be an habitation for the redeemed and the Redeemer, Matthew 25:34. Angels [were created to be] ministering spirits [to the inhabitants of the] lower world [which is] to be the stage of the wonderful Work [of Redemption].

Though Stout’s comments on angels within the theology of Jonathan Edwards are small, it proves to make a significant contribution to students interested in the subject.

Amy Plantinga Pauw’s article, “Where Theologians Fear to Tread,” appeals to the practice of Baroque musical ornamentation as an analogy to the place of reflection on angels and demons in Christian theology. In a manner left to the preference of the performer, this contemplation serves to greatly enrich the primary theological melody of God, Christ, human salvation, and in particular, eschatology. Pauw used Jonathan Edwards and Karl Barth as test cases for her thesis. She affirmed that while Edwards’ usage of angels and Satan mutes his eschatology of glory by drawing attention to the humility and suffering of Christ, Barth’s treatment accentuates the sovereignty of God and Christ’s victory over sin.

The resurgence of interest in Jonathan Edwards has produced several helpful works that solidify his writings on a number of topics. The publication of The Jonathan

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23 Pauw, “Where Theologians Fear to Tread,” 40.
Edwards Encyclopedia in 2017, amassed nearly four hundred entries, providing a wide-ranging perspective on Edwards’ life, thought, and work. This encyclopedia includes a small entry on angels.24 This brief entry provides the reader with an overview of Edwards’ angelology, and specifically points out the correlation between angels and Christology.

Void in the Literature

The musings of Jonathan Edwards on the subject of angels occupy over fifty of his Miscellanies. Edwards’ other corpus is relatively void of lengthy discussion of the heavenly realm. It is possible that because the Miscellanies were never meant for wide public consummation, Edwards’ writings on angels have gone unnoticed within the academic world. A proper investigation regarding Edwards’ wider historic and theological context regarding his angelology is lacking within current scholarship. Outside of the three works mentioned, any examination of Edwards’ angelology is absent in academic and scholarly writings. In view of these observations, a proper analysis of Edwards’ corpus on the subject of angels is necessary among the panoply of other scholarly writings on the New England pastor-theologian. While McClymond and McDermott’s The Theology of Jonathan Edwards is a helpful contribution to Edwards studies, it only provides a small window into his observations on angels. The chapter “The Angels in the Plan of Salvation” introduces the reader to the concept and connection Edwards makes on angels and their Christological connection, but leaves the reader desiring more. For instance, what biblical evidence does Edwards provide when placing angels within the framework of Christology? Why does Edwards view Lucifer as a type of Christ? And, to what extent does Edwards see the ascension of Christ as the penultimate event in the confirmation of the elect angels? While McClymond and McDermott are extremely helpful in introducing these questions, they only provide small evidence from Edwards’ writings to support their answers.

In his “Editor’s Introduction,” in volume 22 of the Yale edition of *The Work of Jonathan Edwards*, Harry S. Stout takes up the subject of angels only so far as it plays a role in Edwards’ view of the history of redemption. He emphasizes heaven as a primary subject in the corpus of Edwards, but only gives a cursory mention of angels within that heavenly realm. To properly understand Edwards’ concept of the history of redemption, a student must explore where he places angels within this context. What role do they play in God’s redemptive story? What connection does Edwards make regarding angels and human beings? These questions, and more, must be answered to arrive at a full orbed picture of Edwards’ understanding of angels within the wider plan of God in saving humans and consummating the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Amy Plantinga Pauw’s article “Where Theologians Fear to Tread” proves useful as an overview of Edwards’ angelology, but like other writings on the subject, leaves the reader wanting more. She introduces the observation that dominant among Edwards’ writings on angels is love and humility in the life of faith, extending to both the divine and human sides of the work of redemption. While introducing the theme, Pauw provides only brief evidence among the writings of Edwards that substantiates her claim.

Examining the relationship between angels and Christology within the writings of Jonathan Edwards raises a host of challenging questions and inquiries that need to be investigated more carefully than any literature currently does. This thesis seeks to expand on the themes of the elect and fallen angels and their role within redemptive history as it concerns the work of Christ.

**Methodology**

This dissertation examines the angelology of Jonathan Edwards, primarily within the exploration of the subject in his *Miscellanies*. This dissertation lays the foundation of angelic theological reflection in the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and Puritan eras, in order to clearly demonstrate that Jonathan Edwards stands in a long line of theologians and thinkers on this celestial subject. This historic legacy greatly impacts
the angelic musings of Jonathan Edwards, as he adopts many of the positions of his theological forbearers in shaping his own unique angelology. Next, Edwards’ angelology is surveyed within the three standard medieval themes of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels. Then, a close examination will be done of Edwards’ interest in the mission and function of the angels within the context of redemptive history as well as his use of angels within his theological emphasis on Christology. This dissertation then observes and assesses Edwards’ position on the fall of Lucifer and the other angels. Finally, the conclusion of this thesis provides implications of Edwards’ angelology and explores further areas of reading and research on the subject.
CHAPTER 2
PATRISTIC ANGELOLOGY AND JONATHAN EDWARDS

The church is not a gold foundry nor a workshop for silver, but an assembly of angels.¹
John Chrysostom (349–407)

Emerging after the New Testament, the theologians of the early church considered angels as central players in God’s creation, the individual Christian life, and the life of the church. For many, the primary responsibility of the angelic world was originally to govern the material world, as well as to guide the nations of the world to serve God. Later church fathers write that Israel, God’s people, received the law from angels and angels assisted in preparing God’s chosen people for the advent of the Messiah.

The progression of the theology of the church fathers through the centuries gave rise to the placement of angels in a more centralized role within the context of redemptive history. Expanding the angelic dominion from guiding the nations and preparing Israel for her Messiah, the fathers postulated the idea that angels serve as guides and protectors of the church, including specific individual congregations. In addition, the fathers affirmed the angelic presence in the preparation of souls in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the receiving of the sacraments, and were part of the worship of the Eucharist, which was regarded as participation in the worship of heaven. Finally, these early Christian thinkers and writers revealed that angels would return with Jesus Christ in his second advent to judge the world and take dynamic roles in that final judgment.

For the individual, many of the earliest theologians believed angels were assigned at birth as guides and guardians. For example, at a person’s baptism, this

celestially assigned guardian took on a new role in guiding the soul of the Christian by providing positive aid, bringing that individual’s personal prayers before God, acting in the soul’s continual repentance, and serving as an intermediary of God’s blessings. At the end of the Christian life, many believed the angels, specifically the individual guardian angel, assisted the soul into the portals of heaven.

The writings of Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 35–107) reveal that he considered the varied angelic orders and powers recognizing a diversity within the angelic host. In his work on the Epistle to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome (c. AD 96) wrote, “Let us think of the whole host of angels, how they stand by and serve his will.” In the writings of Irenaeus (c. AD 130–202) angels are mentioned in order to refute heretical notions about them, rather than describe them. The writings of Athenagoras (133–190), an Ante-Nicene Christian apologist who lived in the second half of the second-century in Athens Greece, and the Shepherd of Hermas, a Christian literary work of the late first or mid-second century, suggest that angels were created by God to govern and rule over the world of matter by supplying the particular parts of God’s providence, essentially acting as mediators for God’s divine will for the cosmos. Origen (c. AD 185–254) comments on

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the varied roles God has assigned to his angels. Athanasius (c. 296–373) had no doubt regarding the reality of angels within the dominion of God. He stated, “For there are many Archangels, many Thrones, and Authorities, and Dominions, thousands of thousands, and myriads of myriads, standing before Him, ministering and ready to be sent.” Basil the Great (c. 330–379) was one of the most highly respected theologians of the fourth century. He writes of angels, “They fill the essence of this invisible world.” Ambrose (c. 339–397), Bishop of Milan, tells us that angels are part of God’s glory and wherever God goes, the angels go. Syrian monk and priest, John of Damascus (676–749), believed God had designed certain angels to keep watch over different parts of the earth, thus controlling the history of humanity and giving them their aid. As vast as the aforementioned writings of the early church fathers may be, their comments on angels are not substantial enough to explore in this study.

In The Angels and Their Mission, Jean Daniélou presents his in-depth scholarship of angelology during the patristic era through the lens of the history of redemption. The Middle Ages received the teaching and writing of the patristic era regarding the angels in Scripture and progressed in their own development of this heavenly subject and thus provided subsequent generations a rich well from which to draw regarding their understanding of these celestial beings. The focus of this particular study, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who is far removed from the first and second

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centuries of church history, emerges from this rich Augustinian tradition of thinking regarding his own development of angelology. It is necessary to begin this exploration of the history of angels within Christian thought by examining the theological positions of these early patristic writers in order to fully appreciate and comprehend the vast tradition from which Edwards assimilates his own view of angels. This chapter surveys a selection of early patristic writers on the subject of angels and seeks to set the table for Jonathan Edwards who later serves the full meal of a fully orbed angelology.

Augustine

Augustine (354–430), the Bishop of Hippo and the most widely recognized of the early church fathers, addresses the subject of the angelic at length in *De Trinitate* and *De Civitate Dei de Genesi ad Litteram.* Augustine rarely mentions angels in *Enchiridion,* which was composed around the same period as the earlier works mentioned. In this particular text, Augustine does not appear to be fully persuaded of the actual necessity of a complex angelology within the development of his own personal theology. David Keck notes,

"The attitude of Christian theologians towards the study of the angelic nature prior to the rise of scholasticism seems best exemplified by Augustine, who called speculations into such matters nothing more than a “useful exercise for the intellect.” In his estimation, the questions were ultimately unworthy of extended contemplation. Thus he writes, “For what is the necessity for affirming, or denying, or defining with accuracy on these subjects, and others like them, when we may without blame be entirely ignorant of them.”"

Nonetheless, it seems apparent when reading through his works that Augustine does not completely dismiss the subject of angels. He identifies them as spiritual beings,


called “angels” because of their office. He affirms that the nature of the angels is such that they are to be acknowledged as immortal, yet mutable. Augustine’s views on the angelic metamorphosed throughout the years of his ministry and writing corpus. For instance, though he grappled with the idea, Augustine was seemingly unable to produce an answer regarding the necessity of angels possessing actual bodies. However, throughout his writings, particularly in De Libero Arbitrio, written in 395, Augustine seemingly resolves the position that angels do not possess actual bodies. By 408, Augustine was afraid that his denial of actual angelic bodies conflicted with Psalm 104:4, which undoubtedly presents angels as spiritual creatures. As Augustine’s theological understanding developed, in works such as De Civitate Dei, he appears to move toward the likelihood that angels possessed bodies but evades the desire to compel anyone toward his personal views. Karl Pelz notes, “Augustine believed that while such matters may be interesting upon which to speculate, one must be careful to not actively contradict established theological truths.”

Less established in his opinion, Augustine is reticent in his opinion to accurately pinpoint the precise time within the week of creation as to when God created the angels. He is quick to emphasize that the creation account revealed in Genesis does not directly mention the creation of angels and is in fact surprisingly silent on the matter, giving more consideration to the creation of God’s other creatures. For Augustine, the

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16 Christopher J. Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians: The Place of Angels in the Theology of Martin Luther” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2014), 41.

17 “He makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire” (Ps 104:4). All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

creation of the angels is a matter of textual and theological speculation. He alludes to the angelic creation when examining the opening chapters of the book of Genesis and speculates that the creation of “heaven” in Genesis 1:1 inaugurates the ex nihilo creation of spiritual beings, while the creation of “light” in Genesis 1:3 serves as the time in which those celestial creatures come to the light, launching them forth as servants of God. Therefore, the terminology of angel, can be employed as a designation of all creatures and inhabitants of heaven, which came into existence on the first day. Within this discussion, Augustine was careful to point out that though the creation account in Genesis does not directly mention the creation of angels, it was conceivable that God created the angels preceding the creation of the cosmos—or that the angels were created in tandem with the establishment of the cosmos. However, these propositions do not involve any essentiality when striving to more fully understand and comprehend the angels. For Augustine, the most vital element remains that angels must be comprehended in a manner that fully and completely sets them apart from being co-eternal with the triune God.

According to Augustine, though angels are the penultimate beings of the creation of God, they were not brought into existence within a state of perpetual joy. It was with God’s assistance in cooperation with their own willful response to that assistance that brought the holy angels into a state of perpetual perseverance and goodness in truth. Moreover, from this juncture forward angels possess the capability to live within the city of God, and most importantly, see and worship God directly. Augustine employs Genesis

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21 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 68.

1:4, where God drives a separation between the light and the darkness, as a potential allusion to the event of the angels assuming a position of ultimate joy. Augustine affirmed that angels possess “true wealth” and a “perfection of justice,” but nonetheless their innate power originates directly from God himself, and they continuously work to accomplish God’s eternal will and decrees in meticulous flawlessness extending, according to Augustine, beyond mere human capability to comprehend, much less imitate. Even though they are said to ascend and descend upon Christ, the angels do not derive the gift of the death of Christ in the same manner as humanity. However, the angels await to welcome believers into the celestial City of God. Regarding their precise numbers, Augustine avoids all speculation, choosing to only express the fact that he believes they are numerous and beyond counting.

Augustine observes several types regarding the nature of angelic knowledge. First, he understood their intelligence in contrast to humanity and saw them not being limited to physical matter and able to understand and perceive God directly with no hindrance. Second, angels are made aware of other creatures through *rationes aeternae*. Third, Augustine said that divine messengers “refer their knowledge of creatures to the praise of God.” The formulation of these three types of knowledge flow out of the account of creation itself and its account of morning, day, and night—possibly also influenced by Plotinus.

In the construction and organization of the angelic types, Augustine chooses to follow in the footsteps of the apostle Paul: Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Principalities, and Virtues. These individual types are labeled by Augustine as

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legions and choirs. With glaring dissimilarity to the elaborate angelic types and hierarchies developed by Christian thinkers that follow Augustine, this is where his angelic organization concludes. 

Nevertheless, Karl Plez observes, “Augustine remains noncommittal as to the exact delineations and divisions between the different choirs, sometimes even collapsing them or confusing them.”

The role of angels in the event of creation, apart from their role in other areas, is only scantly addressed by Augustine. Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* 12.24 is the only recorded place where he addresses the topic. He writes to dissuade his readers in believing that human beings, animals, and other creatures were created by the creative powers of angels. He affirms that those creatures were fashioned alone by God. Yet, he demonstrates the angelic involvement in creation by using the illustration of a gardener attending his orchards: though a gardener tends his orchard, neither the tree nor the gardener can take credit for the production of the fruit. The angels, says Augustine, only participate in the “production” of certain objects because they are “permitted and commissioned” to do so. In short, Augustine writes, “The angels work, but God grants the increase.”

He continues by providing an additional example taking his reader to the event of the creation of Eve. He affirms the presence of the angels at her creation but explains they did not “create” her. Though they did not create Eve, Augustine suggests the angels may have assisted God in the creation of Eve by placing Adam in a state of sleep while his rib was removed. Though the angels may have participated in the

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31 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 73.

creation event, it is essential that Augustine’s readers affirm that God fully governs his creation in a manner in which his creatures have the freedom to function in ways that are harmonious with their nature. In fact, though God performs actions solely through himself, God often chooses to employ angels as dispensers of those actions. Within the context of their creation, Augustine also upholds the position that God beautifies the angels out of his own being. In the same way, he makes the unambiguous comment that while God often dispatches his angels to the aid and guidance of humanity, the beautification experienced by humanity does not derive from the angels themselves, but solely from God their creator. Unlike his creatures, God, as an eternal being, operates and acts outside the constraints of time. On the other hand, though the angels are beings within time and know the plan of God, they serve as his administrators and intermediaries to creatures incapable of knowing and beholding God in a direct manner. This function and work are, according to Augustine, their principal work.

Within Augustine’s theology is a division of the angels into two categories: physical and intellectual. The extent of angelic power, their work, and their scope extends not only beyond that of humanity, but also vastly beyond the power of the fallen evil spirits. Regarding their intimate interaction with God’s creation, Augustine is noncommittal regarding the angel’s action, function, and role. Augustine was tentative vis-à-vis the physical form of angels. He comments that angels either assemble this physical form or take on the appearance of a physical form. Their intellectual capacity and activity is of such that the angels not only directly convey visions into the minds of human beings, but in addition, assist in their ability to receive such visions.

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33 Augustine, *City of God* VII.30-32, 141; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1:212.


Augustine stood guardedly on affirming the angelic physique. The angelic body, he believed, was far greater than that of a human body, possessing more acute senses than humans. Moreover, angels possess comprehensive autonomy over their own form and therefore are not dependent upon things like food, water, or sexual activity. Augustine’s anthropological understanding placed humans somewhere between angels and beasts. Like an animal, humans are mortal, Augustine purported, but like angels, humans possess cognitive reasoning skills of the intellect. Augustine held to the view that God created human beings to reside between the angelic and animal kingdom, and that humans gainimmortality when they continue to obey the commandments of God and acknowledge him as creator and Lord. As a result, humanity eventually enters the company of angels without experiencing death. For example, Augustine writes that, had sin not become a reality at the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity would have maintained a state of perfection and blessedness in the Garden of God, never experienced any physical or mental struggles, and resided in this state until “the number of predestined saints should have been completed.” If humans would have remained in this eternal state of perfection, the same happiness enjoyed by the angels would have also been available to humans in a place where “a blessedness in which there should be been a secure assurance that no one would sin, and no one die.” As a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, the only possibility of humanity entering this blessed state once again is after the final resurrection. Even before God gave the Law, the commandments of God, to his people they would have been taught this way by God and would have moved toward this penultimate goal by the angels themselves. After the Law was handed down by God, the prophets acted as guides


38 Augustine, City of God IX.14, 173; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 1:262.

39 Augustine, City of God XIV.11, 271; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 2:430.
to their fellow humans, and Augustine affirms, the prophets, through whom the promises of God were proclaimed, acted in a role similar to the role of angels.40

Augustine believed the line between angels and humans can easily become distorted, specifically in terms of the role played by each creature. Though angels are employed by God to serve as his usual messengers, human beings are also called to act in a commensurate way to their fellow human beings “so as not to denigrate human nature.”41 In addition, humans are commanded to function “in our measure” in the same manner angels do in proclaiming the will of God and praising his glory.42 As Augustine emphasizes, Christ himself, in addition to the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, and the apostle Paul are equally commissioned “angels” in the sense that they execute their office as messengers of God.43 After the final resurrection, humanity will possess an existence in resemblance in quality to that of the holy angels.44 According to De Civitate Dei, the fallen angels, who were not found worthy, will be replaced by God with glorified human beings, which will in turn increase the numbered inhabitants of God’s eternal holy city.45 The elect earthly citizens of the City of God will be found in complete perfection, existing “in that immortal condition in which they equal the angels.”46 Augustine writes, “Those men who have been embraced by God’s grace, and are become the fellow-citizens of the holy angels who have continued in bliss, shall never more either

40 Augustine, City of God X.24, 196; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 1:299.


42 Augustine, City of God X.25, 197; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 1:299.


46 Augustine, City of God XV.26, 306-7; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 2:494.
sin or die, being endued with spiritual bodies; yet being clothed with immortality, such as the angels enjoy.”47

Augustine explains that after the final resurrection godly saints will not require any sustenance. As a result, they never suffer from hunger, thirst, old age, or sickness and disease. If they choose to do so, they may still eat and will never lose the capacity to do so, though there will be no need of food in that eternal state.48 Augustine compares the angels who assume physical bodies in their interaction with humans. The angels, he writes, do not need to assume bodies because of an inherent deficiency within themselves, but do so in the desire to serve in the capacity of a “manhood ministry.” Similarly, when the angels eat while in these human avatars, they are actually eating out of sheer choice and not because they must necessarily do so. Augustine draws a parallel with Christ, who after his resurrection possessed a “spiritual but real flesh” physicality and participated in the eating of a meal with his followers. Thus, “[these bodies] will be spiritual, not because they shall cease to be bodies, but because they shall subsist by the quickening spirit.”49

Augustine does not employ the term church when writing and discussing the angels in their relationship to Christians. In his seminal work City of God, he frames his discussion using the terminology of God’s heavenly city as an actual physical habitation “composed of holy angels and blessed spirits” where Christians and angels intermingle.50 In Augustine’s thinking, this takes place after death but he offers the suggestion that this type of relationship may also take place while the human continues to dwell upon the earth. It is clear from his writing that Augustine’s initial concern is exploring the

47 Augustine, City of God XV.26, 306; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 2:494.
49 Augustine, City of God XIII.22, 255-57; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 2:404.
50 Augustine, City of God XII.10, 232; Augustine, De Civitate Dei, 2:364.
relationship between angels and humans who dwell together in the heavenly Jerusalem, and he is less concerned with the relationship shared between the two parties prior to death. The celestial city is populated, Augustine argues, by saints and angels who are “united.” These individuals are currently present there in spirit or continue to walk on the earth and await their translation to the city at the point of death. \(^5\) Augustine believed God himself foresaw the justification of people who the Holy Spirit would adopt and unite to the angels following the destruction of death at the end. \(^5\) Regardless of one’s prominence in society or the evils of the physical world they may have endured, humanity is longing for an “eminent place in that most holy and august assembly of angels and republic of heaven.” \(^5\) Augustine alleged angels and Christians shared considerable commonalities with one another, such as a virtuous will and the yearning and ability to dedicate themselves to the worship and adoration of the same God. \(^5\) While a wide disparage remains between angels and humans regarding their strength and physicality, the fact that humans reside on earth is no obstruction to their fellowship with them. Augustine says that what may impede such a union is when humanity is far too engaged in and fixated on the objects of this world. Yet, “while we are being healed that we may eventually be as they are,” angels linger close to humans and assist Christians in their belief in Christ and in drawing them closer to both him and the angels themselves. \(^5\)

Within the writings of Augustine, there is a careful delineation of the motivations of the angels in stimulating human worship. It is true that angels desire the participation of humanity in a relationship together, and it is also true that the angels

\(^5\) Augustine, *City of God* XII.10, 232; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2:364.

\(^5\) Augustine, *City of God* XII.22, 242; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2:381.

\(^5\) Augustine, *City of God* II.18, 34; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1:51-52.


\(^5\) Augustine, *City of God* VIII.26, 163; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1:244-46.
desire humanity to join with them as citizens of the *City of God*, but the objective of angels for humanity is to direct their worship to God alone. The angels desire, Augustine said, is that humanity receive and experience the same blessing from God that they themselves enjoy. They are ultimately delighted when they witness humanity in adoration and praise of the triune God. Augustine writes,

> It is very right that these blessed and immortal spirits, who inhabit celestial dwellings, and rejoice in the communications of their Creator’s fullness, firm in His eternity, assured in His truth, holy by His grace, since they compassionately and tenderly regard us as miserable mortals, and wish us to become immortal and happy, do not desire us to sacrifice to themselves, but to Him whose sacrifice they know themselves to be in common with us.56

Therefore, the only proper visible and invisible sacrifice of a Christian’s worship is to God alone. In beholding this worship, the angels rejoice and even assist the human worshipper as much as possible to bring that which is pleasing before God in adoring his person. If Christian offers sacrifice or worship to the angels, Augustine says, the angels will vehemently reject such worship and strictly forbid such worship.57 The incarnation of Christ signifies that Christians need no other mediator between themselves and God, including the angelic mediation. Because of Christ’s mediatorial work, Christian’s now have direct admittance to “the participation of his divinity.” Moreover, Christ never leads Christians directly to angels, as if to say that they might be justified and saved by participating in their nature. Instead, Christ leads the Christian to his own Triune self. Christ leads believers to the same fountain of immortality and blessedness that the angels also experience and participate.58 Augustine writes, “He [God] says that he shall flow

56 Augustine, *City of God* X.6, 184; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1:280.

57 Augustine, *City of God* X.19, 192-93; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1:293.

58 Augustine, *City of God* IX.16, 175; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1:263.
down as this river, that he may as it were pour himself from things above to things beneath, and make men the equal of the angels.”59

Undergirding these comments is the ultimate conclusion of Augustine’s theology regarding the angels. Worship, he believed, was the most collective manner in which the union of angels and Christians was fully revealed. He writes, “In heaven, human beings will worship God just as the angels do.”60 This essential foundation buttresses the inference that Augustine is conferring the angelic relationship to the church, though he does not express it in this exacting terminology.

This survey of Augustine’s theological contribution to the celestial beings in no way encompasses the extent of his full understating or meditation on these creatures. In fact, it is evident that his comments are rather limited in scope. Whether they agree with his premises or not, the Christian theologians and churchmen of the following centuries were undoubtedly influenced by Augustine’s work in this area of theology. His distillation and compilation of earlier views on angels and his own elucidation of the creation of these beings and their participation in the lives of Christians laid a foundation upon which the angelology of medieval Christianity firmly stood. As questions arose in their own thinking regarding the angelic involvement in creation, their relationship to Christians, relationship to the church, the events surrounding the demise of certain angels, or the exploration of angelic knowledge, the medieval thinkers quickly discovered that Augustine had already gazed into these areas in great detail.61

Chrysostom

Chrysostom (349–407), the Archbishop of Constantinople, was similar to Augustine in demonstrating his well-founded confidence on the existence of angels but

59 Augustine, *City of God* XX.21, 440; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2:736.


does not seem overly anxious to untangle all of the complexities of their nature. Rather, Chrysostom seemed content with his limited knowledge regarding the angelic and only casually remarked that their wings cover their faces, they do not sleep, and they do not possess knees.

Chrysostom, like Augustine, was not focused on angelic nature per se, he concentrated his focus in another area. He was concerned with addressing the Anomoean heresies, consequently placing the prominence of his study on the truth that angels were in fact creatures. As created creatures, he identified the angels as unable to fully and completely know God in his true essence and nature. According to Chrysostom, this large chasm between the Creator and the creature is understood when considering the divine ability of God to instantaneously bring vast numbers of powerful angelic creatures with the smallest measure of his divine will. Cognizant of this separation between the Creator and the creature, Chrysostom identified the angels acting in a manner that is completely appropriate with their being: glorification and worship of God, rather than spending his time on conjecture regarding God’s true essence and nature. He says the comprehension possessed by the Cherubim is unsatisfactory in reaching a complete understanding of God.

In Homily 3 on Hebrews, Chrysostom restructures his dialogue

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63 Tuschling, Angels and Orthodoxy, 69.

64 Tuschling, Angels and Orthodoxy, 92; Chrysostom states, “[Paul] doth not say these things as if he attributed to angels knees and bones.” Chrysostom, Homilies on I Corinthians, I.12.189.

65 Also known as the Eunomians, an offshoot of Arianism. Their central argument was that the Father and the Son were of completely different substance, not merely of similar substance.


of angelic ontology in order to clearly establish the wide-ranging manner in which Jesus Christ is distinctive and varied from the angelic kingdom. He spoke of Christ as “entirely deserving of the Father’s privileges while the ‘office of angels’ exists to ‘minister to God for our salvation.’”\textsuperscript{68} There is little information in the Chrysostom corpus regarding the qualities and fact of angelic existence, yet his position of viewing the angelic office as “ministers” is clearly seen.

Scholarship is somewhat divided regarding Chrysostom’s views concerning the nature of hierarchy among the angels. In \textit{Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in Their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian}, R. M. M. Tuschling suggests that while Chrysostom offers a list describing the angelic hierarchy in his homily on the gospel of Matthew—“angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, whole host, royal palaces, tabernacles”—such detailed description does not suggest that Chrysostom actually presented this list as a formal ranking system. Tuschling points out that Chrysostom was simply “employing a rhetorical flourish.”\textsuperscript{69}

However, Pak-Wah Lai, in his dissertation on John Chrysostom, points to this same list as an indication that a hierarchical system existed within the thinking of Chrysostom. In addition, he emphasizes that Chrysostom claims that this specific list may not include all the ranks within the hierarchical angelic system. In fact, he recognizes the angels as innumerable and therefore their “tribes” may be innumerable as well. Lai suggests that these comments may or may not fully indicate that Chrysostom possessed a formalized angelic hierarchy. However, it is quite evident that he did hold to some type

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 62.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Tuschling, \textit{Angels and Orthodoxy}, 69. Chrysostom says, “What can this light be? Not this, that is sensible; but another far better, which shows us Heaven, the angels, the archangels, the cherubim, the seraphim, the thrones, the dominions, the principalities, the powers, the whole host, the royal palaces, the tabernacles.” Chrysostom, \textit{Homilies}, I.10.324.
\end{itemize}
of degree ranking among the vast number of the angels. For example, he maintained that the Seraphim are actually inferior to the Cherubim, because the Cherubim are employed as those who serve in closest proximity to the throne of God.\(^7^0\)

Angels are tasked, Chrysostom acknowledges, with the fundamental role of serving as administrators of the world. He points out that the angels are involved in the termination of earthly conflict and war, as well as the final plague in Exodus when the first-born sons were to be killed according to the decree of God.\(^7^1\) Chrysostom believed the angels were instruments of God’s punishment according to his forty-third homily on Acts. He may have been referring to Philo who suggested that it would be inappropriate for God to chastise, and this is the reason God sends forth angels as his agents to carry out such punishment within the world.\(^7^2\) Yet, it is clear from his writing that Chrysostom is unsettled as to whether the punishment is carried out by God’s holy angels or the fallen angels. Chrysostom explains the difference between “a band of evil angels that destroyeth,” and an angel of peace.\(^7^3\) While the angels are in the role of being the enforcers of God’s decrees, they also serve as guardians and protectors of humanity. Specifically, Chrysostom declares, “They guard the faithful”\(^7^4\) but they do not only watch over the faithful, he also believed that each individual has an angel as a sentinel to watch over them.\(^7^5\) The angels

\(^7^0\) Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 59-60.


\(^7^2\) Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 70. Chrysostom explains, “But mark His unspeakable love to man, and His leaning to bounty, and His disinclination to punishment; in what, when He sows, He sows in His own person, but when He punishes, it is by others, that is, by the angels.” Chrysostom, *Homily XLVII*, I.10.287

\(^7^3\) Chrysostom, *Homily II*, I.12.284.

\(^7^4\) Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 60.

\(^7^5\) Chrysostom, *Homily XXVI*, I.11.171-72. Chrysostom writes, “This is a truth, that each man has an angel.” Also, “If then we have Angels, let us be sober, as though we were in the presence of tutors; for there is a demon present also.” *Homily III*, I.13.274.
serve as ministers and rescuers of God’s faithful, as Chrysostom points to with Peter in Acts 12.  

Chrysostom recognizes the role of angels in the context of creation as being tightly linked with the existence and life of human beings and of earthly concerns, explaining their defined office as petitioning the salvation of humanity from God.  

He considered that when believers strive to reach others in the purposes of salvation that they “do an angelic work, as fellow-servants with the angels. . . . The space between men and angels is great; nevertheless he brings them down to us all . . . for us they labor . . . for our sake they run to and fro . . . this is their ministry, for our sake to be sent every way.”

In addition, angels work as emissaries for those who have yet to achieve a deeper spiritual existence. Chrysostom argues that the Holy Spirit appears to the believer, but angels deliver messages and visions from God to “rest,” specifically in “former times.” Numerous things are accomplished by God within the context of the ministry and administration of God’s angels, but before the incarnation of Christ, humanity remained in a state of flux regarding eternal damnation. Therefore, “in the fullness of time,” Christ became man and thus eradicated the angelic role as ministers to God’s

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76 Chrysostom writes, “‘Now know I that the Lord hath sent His Angel.’ Why is not this effected by themselves? (I answer,) By this also the Lord honors them, that by the ministry of His Angels he rescues them.” Homily XXVI, I.11.171-73.

77 Tuschling, Angels and Orthodoxy, 69.


79 Chrysostom explains, “Observe also at what time: in the most violent heat (of the day). “And the Spirit said unto him” (v. 29). Not now the Angel but the Spirit urges him. Why is this? “Then,” the vision took place, in grosser form, through the Angel, for this is for them that are more of the body, but the Spirit is for the more spiritual.” Chrysostom, Homily XIX, I.11.121-23.

80 Chrysostom states, “For they may not think Him to be of more recent existence, because that in former times the approach was through Angels, but now through Him; he shows first, that they had no power (for else it had not been ‘out of darkness’ that he brought), next, that He is also before them.” Chrysostom, Homily III, I.13.270-72.

81 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 75.
people.\textsuperscript{82} Chrysostom explains, “For many have come to save both prophets and angels; but this, saith one, is the true Saviour, who affordeth the true salvation, not that which is but for a time.”\textsuperscript{83} In Acts 10, when Cornelius experienced an angelic visitation, Chrysostom said, “It first rouses and elevates his mind.”\textsuperscript{84} Further, angels also indirectly support the event of preaching by commissioning the preacher to preach rather than them doing it themselves.\textsuperscript{85}

The nature of angelic-human interaction was complex within the writings of Chrysostom, and at times may appear quite contradictory. In \textit{De Incomprehensibili de Batura}, and in other texts, he seems assured that the chasm between celestial beings and earthly beings was too great to overcome. In this same homily he makes a firm argument that angels share very little in common with the human race. In \textit{Homilies} 2 and 3 he defines the whole of the creation of the physical world as merely worthless and insignificant in comparison with a single angel. He even suggests that the prophet Daniel was unable to see an angel in its true essence and nature.\textsuperscript{86}

Nonetheless, Chrysostom’s ideas regarding the relationship that exists between humanity and the angelic feature the prospect of virtuous and holy humanity might become

\textsuperscript{82} Chrysostom writes, The fullness of times, however, was His coming. After, then, He had done everything, by the ministry both of Angels, and of Prophets, and of the Law, and nothing came of it, and it was well nigh to this, that man had been made in vain, brought into the world in vain, nay, rather to his ruin; when all were absolutely perishing, more fearfully than in the deluge, He devised this dispensation, that is by grace; that it might not be in vain, might not be to no purpose that man was created. This he calls ‘the fullness of the times,’ and ‘wisdom.'” (Chrysostom, \textit{Homily I}, I.13.55-56)


\textsuperscript{84} Chrysostom, \textit{Homily XXII}, I.11.142-43.

\textsuperscript{85} Chrysostom states, “And the Angel of the Lord,” etc. (Recapitulation, v. 26). See Angels assisting the preaching, and not themselves preaching, but calling these (to the work). But the wonderful nature of the occurrence is shown also by this: that what of old was rare, and hardly done, here takes place with ease, and see with what frequency! (Chrysostom, \textit{Homily XIX}, I.11.122)

analogous to angels, essentially to the point of possibly surpassing or actually becoming them. In fact, during the creation event, Chrysostom believed angels and humans were principally the same: “Prelapsarian humanity was angelic” and did not suffer passions such as desire. In addition, he said their pre-fall bodies were not subject to certain needs like they are currently, but were incorruptible and immortal and enjoyed a state that was “not inferior to the angels.”\(^{87}\) He suggests that God planned for humanity to spend his days upon the earth like a “terrestrial angel.”\(^{88}\) Notwithstanding the consequences of the fall of humanity through Adam in the Garden of Eden, Chrysostom affirmed that a Christian can still “live the life of the angels” while residing in a corporeal form. Notwithstanding their physicality, according to Chrysostom, humans are in no way “inferior to those [heavenly beings] who inhabit the heaven.”\(^{89}\) Similarly, in Chrysostom’s homilies on the book of Acts, he argues that the nature of virtue is what defines angels as actually being angels, whereas humanity becoming angelic is wholly possible.\(^{90}\) However, lest one equate “practicing ascetism” with the “attainment of virtue,” like many of the contemporaries of Chrysostom, he prudently demarcates the distinction, saying, “Not because they do not

\(^{87}\) Chrysostom writes,

[God] for his part intended from the beginning that human beings should enjoy life in the garden, have a life free from pain, be relieved of any distress, and while happening to be in bodily condition to enjoy a status not inferior to the angels and those incorporeal powers but even be proof against bodily needs? (Chrysostom, *Homilies XXVII*, II.162-63)

\(^{88}\) Chrysostom states, “On the contrary, as I said before, he intended man should pass his days on earth like some terrestrial angel.” Chrysostom, “Homily 15,” *Homilies on Genesis* I.205

\(^{89}\) Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 67. Chrysostom writes,

Let us then be persuaded, and indulge ourselves in His love. For in this way we shall both see His Kingdom even from out of this life, and shall be living the life of Angels, and while we abide on earth, we shall be in as goodly a condition as they that dwell in heaven; and after our departing hence, shall stand the brightest of beings by the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall enjoy that glory unutterable, which may we all attain unto, by the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Chrysostom, *Homily XXII*, I.11.516-17)

\(^{90}\) Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 69. Chrysostom explains, “In a word, it is virtue which makes angels: but this is in our power: therefore we are able to make angels, though not in nature, certainly in will.” Chrysostom, *Homily XXXII*, I.11.205.
marry, therefore they are angels, but because they are angels, therefore they do not marry.”

The action of a human being does not denote a person as an angel, or is such attainment achieved through the renouncement of all earthly possessions. Commenting on Hebrews in *Homily 9*, Chrysostom says, “Living like the angels and needing not one of these earthy things” is not exactly one and the same thing; however, both are still prerequisite for the “introduction” into the coming eternal world, which is marked by “eternal life and angelic conversation,” which humans may currently employ themselves. He is careful to point out that mortality plays a vital role within an angelic life; however, mortality is not the determining factor, but merely a principle thereof. In his *Homily 11*, Chrysostom argues that humanity has been freed from evil through Christ by instilling within them his righteousness, thus directing individuals to this “angelic life.” Christ not only allows humanity to attain this “angelic life,” but also blazes the trail into the same as an example to emulate and follow. Lai emphasizes that Chrysostom’s procurement of the terminology of the “angelic life” is nothing more than a greater way to emphasize the Christian life as an ideal life, illustrating what he develops as

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92 Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 67. Chrysostom states, “And tasted,” he says, “the good word of God”; and he does not unfold it; “and the powers of the world to come,” for to live as Angels and to have no need of earthly things, to know that this is the means of our introduction to the enjoyment of the worlds to come; this may we learn through the Spirit, and enter into those sacred recesses. What are “the powers of the world to come?” Life eternal, angelic conversation. Of these we have already received the earnest through our Faith from the Spirit.” (Chrysostom, *Homily IX*, I.14.411)

93 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 82.

94 Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 67. Chrysostom suggests, For God hath done the same as if a person were to take an orphan, who had been carried away by savages into their own country, and were not only to free him from captivity, but were to set a kind father over him, and bring him to very great dignity. And this has been done in our case. For it was not our old evils alone that He freed us from, since He even led us to the life of angels, and paved the way for us to the best conversation, handing us over to the safe keeping of righteousness, and killing our former evils, and deadening the old man, and leading us to an immortal life. (Chrysostom, *Homily XI*, I.11.412-13)
resemblances between an angel and Christian: “Like an angel, the Christian should not be
given in marriage, not love material riches, should enjoy immortality, participate in the
heavenly politikos and attain a morality reminiscent to the angels.”95 Additionally,
Chrysostom believed it was only due to the influence and work of the Son of God, Jesus
Christ, on the Christian that he or she could begin to attain the angelic life. Upon the life
of the Christian, Christ is the one who brings “the way of life of the angels.”96 Flowing
out of this assessment, Chrysostom comprehends the work of Christ as functioning for
humans on two different levels: a soteriological level and an eschatological level.
Regarding his soteriological level, Chrysostom views the salvation of Christ as a reversion
back to a prelapsarian life experienced by Adam and Eve prior to the fall.97 He sees the
eschatological level as the transformation of a person to a sacred status once they are drawn
into the angelic life to become both angel and priest.98 However, Chrysostom argues that
the ascension into this angelic life by the Christian does not inevitably end there. He
suggests that paralleling the angelic life to the life of a Christian is essential in
understanding how far the Christian has surpassed the angelic because of his salvation in


96 Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 57-58. Chrysostom explains,
The Son of the Very God, hath brought every virtue, hath brought down from Heaven all the fruits
that are from thence, the songs of heaven hath He brought. For the words which the Cherubim above
say, these hath He charged us to say also, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” He hath brought to us the virtue of the
Angels. “The Angels marry not, neither are given in marriage” (Matt. xxii. 30.; this fair plant hath
He planted here also. They love not money, nor anything like it; and this too hath He sown amongst
us. They never die; and this hath He freely given us also, for death is no longer death, but sleep.”
(Chrysostom, Homily XXIII, 1.13.166)


98 Tuschling, Angels and Orthodoxy, 204; Chrysostom writes,
“For if ye do these things,” [Paul] says, “for instance, if ye be ‘of one mind’ and ‘live in peace,’ God
also will be with you, for He is ‘the God of love and of peace,’ and in these things He delighteth, He
rejoiceth. Hence shall peace also be yours from His love; hence shall every evil be removed. This saved
the world, this ended the long war, this blended together heaven and earth, this made men angels. This
then let us also imitate, for love is the mother of countless good things. By this we were saved, by
this all those unspeakable good things [come] to us.” (Chrysostom, Homily XXX, I.12.418)
Christ. Chrysostom describes humanity as “senseless than stone,” but elevated because of the incarnation of Christ. Not only are humans elevated in position as the angels, but they also have “become the body of the Master of the angels and archangels, and from not knowing who is God, they instantly become even sharers of God’s throne.” Essentially, for Chrysostom, the human living of the angelic life is a partaking in the divine life.99

The position Chrysostom held regarding the relationship between the church and angels is best summarized with a statement from *Homily 50*: “The church is not a gold foundry nor a worship for silver, but an assembly of angels.”100 It was important for him to highlight the angelic congregation surrounding the altar of God during worship, principally for the Eucharist.101

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99 Lai, “John Chrysostom and the Hermeneutics,” 68. Chrysostom writes, For the great glory of this mystery is apparent among others also, but much more among these. For, on a sudden, to have brought men more senseless than stones to the dignity of Angels, simply through bare words, and faith alone, without any laboriousness, is indeed glory and riches of mystery: just as if one were to take a dog, quite consumed with hunger and the mange, foul, and loathsome to see, and not so much as able to move, but lying cast out, and make him all at once into a man, and to display him upon the royal throne. They were wont to worship stones and the earth; but they learned that themselves are better both than the heaven and the sun, and that the whole world serveth them; they were captives and prisoners of the devil: on a sudden they are placed above his head, and lay commands on him and scourge him: from being captives and slaves to demons, they are become the body of The Master of the Angels and the Archangels; from not knowing even what God is, they are become all at once sharers even in God’s throne.” (Chrysostom, *Homily V*. I.13.280)


101 Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 79. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homily XXIV*, Chrysostom explains, Again I see others stand talking while Prayer is going on; while the more consistent of them (do this) not only during the Prayer, but even when the Priest is giving the Benediction. O, horror! When shall there be salvation? when shall it be possible for us to propitiate God?—Soldiers go to their diversion, and you shall see them, all keeping time in the dance, and not hing done negligently, but, just as in embroidery and painting, from the well ordered arrangement in each individual part of the composition, there results at once an exceeding harmony and good keeping, so it is here: we have one shield, one head, all of us (in common): and if but some casual point be deranged by negligence, the whole is deranged and is spoilt, and the good order of the many is defeated by the disorder of the one part. And, fearful indeed to think of, here you come, not to a diversion, not to act in a dance, and yet you stand disorderly. Know you not that you are standing in company with angels? with them you chant, with them sing hymns, and do you stand laughing? Is it not wonderful that a thunderbolt is not launched not only at those (who behave thus), but at us? For such behavior might well be visited with the thunderbolt.” (Chrysostom, *Homilies*, I.11.160-61)
Tuschling provides various examples, such as “angels stand around the priest and the [earthly] sanctuary is filled with the powers of heaven;” “remember with whom you stand at the moment of the mysteries, with the cherubim and seraphim,” and “when entering a church, be mindful that you are singing with the seraphim.”

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102 Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 203.

103 Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 203. Chrysostom states, And whenever he invokes the Holy Spirit, and offers the most dread sacrifice, and constantly handles the common Lord of all, tell me what rank shall we give him? What great purity and what real piety must we demand of him? For consider what manner of hands they ought to be which minister in these things, and of what kind his tongue which utters such words, and ought not the soul which receives so great a spirit to be purer and holier than anything in the world? At such a time angels stand by the Priest; and the whole sanctuary, and the space round about the altar, is filled with the powers of heaven, in honor of Him who lieth thereon. (Chrysostom, *Homilies*, I.9.76)

104 Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 203. Chrysostom continues, “Our Father!” But what? is this all? Hear also the words, which follow, “which art in Heaven.” The moment thou sayest, “Our Father, which art in Heaven,” the word raises thee up, it gives wings to thy mind, it points out to thee that thou hast a Father in Heaven. Do then nothing, speak nothing of things upon earth. He hath set thee amongst that host above, He hath numbered thee with that heavenly choir. Why dost thou drag thyself down? Thou art standing beside the royal throne, and thou revilest? Art thou not afraid lest the king should deem it an outrage? Why, if a servant, even with us, beats his fellow-servant or assaults him, even though he do it justly, yet we at once rebuke him, and deem the act an outrage; and yet dost thou, who art standing with the Cherubim beside the king’s throne, revile thy brother? Seest thou not these holy vessels? Are they not used continually for only one purpose? Does any one ever venture to use them for any other? Yet art thou holier than these vessels, yea, far holier. Why then defile, why contaminate thyself? Standest thou in Heaven, and dost thou revile? Hast thou thy citizenship with Angels, and dost thou revile? Art thou counted worthy the Lord’s kiss, and dost thou revile? Hath God graced thy mouth with so many and great things, with hymns angelic, with food, not angelic, no, but more than angelic, with His own kiss, with His own embrace, and dost thou revile?” (*Homily XIV*, I.13.120).

105 Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 203. Chrysostom writes, From beneath, out of the heart, draw forth a voice, make thy prayer a mystery. Seest thou not that even in the houses of kings all tumult is put away, and great on all sides is the silence? Do thou also therefore, entering as into a palace,—not that on the earth, but what is far more awful than it, that which is in heaven,—show forth great seemliness. Yea, for thou art joined to the choirs of angels, and art in communion with archangels, and art singing with the seraphim. And all these tribes show forth much goodly order, singing with great awe that mystical strain, and their sacred hymns to God, the King of all. With these then mingle thyself, when thou art praying, and emulate their mystical order. (Chrysostom, *Homily XIX*, I.10.130)
A similar comment is made by Chrysostom in *Homily 14* regarding the singing of the Sanctus in worship. He comments that both human and angelic worshippers sing together and before the altar both heavenly and earthly dominions exist.\(^{106}\)

Within worship, Chrysostom does not differentiate between the actions taking place on earth from those occurring in heaven. He says the sanctuary is occupied by both dominions at the same time. In *Homily 16*, he states,

> Let us no longer continue on the earth; for even now it is possible for him that wishes it, not to be on the earth. For to be and not to be on the earth is the effect of moral disposition and choice. For instance: God is said to be in heaven. Wherefore? not because He is confined by space, far from it, nor as having left the earth destitute of His presence, but by His relation to and intimacy with the angels. If then we also are near to God, we are in heaven.

Though God is omnipresent throughout the cosmos, it is true to describe God as residing in heaven. The presence of angels and glorified saints constitutes heaven as heaven.\(^ {107}\) However, though spoken of in exclusive spiritual and communal terms, heaven is also available to human beings. Within the confines of worship or when God enters his creation, Chrysostom says, heaven positions itself as present upon the earth. In addition, when a preacher preaches, there is a visible and an invisible audience. As he speaks, he does so to a congregation of both angels and humanity with the voice of God, which is

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\(^{106}\) Chrysostom explains,
> Here we must apply our minds attentively, and consider the Apostolic wisdom; for again he shows the difference of the Priesthood. “Who” (he says) “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.” What are the heavenly things he speaks of here? The spiritual things. For although they are done on earth, yet nevertheless they are worthy of the Heavens. For when our Lord Jesus Christ lies slain [as a sacrifice], when the Spirit is with us, when He who sitteth on the right hand of the Father is here, when sons are made by the Washing, when they are fellow-citizens of those in Heaven, when we have a country, and a city, and citizenship there, when we are strangers to things here, how can all these be other than “heavenly things”? But what! Are not our Hymns heavenly? Do not we also who are below utter in concert with them the same things which the divine choirs of bodiless powers sing above? Is not the altar also heavenly? How? It hath nothing carnal, all spiritual things become the offerings. The sacrifice does not disperse into ashes, or into smoke, or into steamy savor, it makes the things placed there bright and splendid. How again can the rites which we celebrate be other than heavenly?” (Chrysostom, *Homily XIV*, I.14.433-34)

\(^{107}\) Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy*, 197-98.
present in heaven and on earth.¹⁰⁸ Chrysostom goes to the extent of postulating that angels may learn of the ways of God from the Holy Spirit a similar manner through which humanity does, namely, through the church: “Angels learned things which before they knew not with us.”¹⁰⁹

More affect can come through the spoken word of God by human instruments, Chrysostom believed, than merely bringing together angels and humans. He says that when an individual is truly receptive, the spoken word may advance humans beyond all the other created beings, and “having transported them into the angelic condition, allows believers to dwell on earth as if it were heaven itself.”¹¹⁰ For Chrysostom, this element signals the penultimate summit of the relationship between angels and humans—believers most fully participate with angels in holy worship when humans encounter the Word of God through the church. This is the point when believers become counterpart to

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¹⁰⁸ Chrysostom writes,
The effects all with his tongue, uttering a voice which is sweeter and more profitable than that of any harper or any music. All heaven is his stage; his theater, the habitable world; his audience, all angels; and of men as many as are angels already, or desire to become so, for none but these can hear that harmony aright, and show it forth by their works. (Chrysostom, Homily I, I.14.2)

¹⁰⁹ Chrysostom, Homily I, I.14.2. Chrysostom explains,
For he will say nothing to us as a man, but what he saith, he will say from the depths of the Spirit, from those secret things which before they came to pass the very Angels knew not; since they too have learned by the voice of John with us, and by us, the things which we know. And this hath another Apostle declared, saying, “To the intent that unto the principalities and powers might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.” (Eph. iii. 10.) If then principalities, and powers, and Cherubim, and Seraphim, learned these things by the Church, it is very clear that they were exceedingly earnest in listening to this teaching; and even in this we have been not a little honored, that the Angels learned things which before they knew not with us. (Chrysostom, Homily I, I.14.2)

¹¹⁰Chrysostom, Homily I, I.14.1. Chrysostom suggests,
When a man is speaking from heaven, and utters a voice plainer than thunder? for he has pervaded the whole earth with the sound; and occupied and filled it, not by the loudness of the cry, but by moving his tongue with the grace of God. And what is wonderful, this sound, great as it is, is neither a harsh nor an unpleasant one, but sweeter and more delightful than all harmony of music, and with more skill to soothe; and besides all this, most holy, and most awful, and full of mysteries so great, and bringing with it goods so great, that if men were exactly and with ready mind to receive and keep them, they could no longer be mere men nor remain upon the earth, but would take their stand above all the things of this life, and having adapted themselves to the condition of angels, would dwell on earth just as if it were heaven. (Chrysostom, Homily I, I.14.2)
angels. In their participation of the Eucharist, Chrysostom alleged believers summon the angels to themselves.\[111\] This is just the base level in this heavenly interaction. By drawing closer to the Holy Spirit and by following the commandments one finds in the church, each believer becomes “nothing inferior to the angels,”\[112\] even if they had experienced evil their whole lives.\[113\] Through the Holy Spirit, humans receive angelic conversation, while at the same time eternal life is granted to those who solely focus their attention on the things of heaven instead of the things of the earth.\[114\] It is into the same church that God has forged together both the angels and humanity. Chrysostom writes,

He [God] hath set over all one and the same Head, i.e. Christ according to the flesh, alike over Angels and men. That is to say, He hath given to Angels and men one and the same government; to the one the Incarnate, to the other God the Word. . . . He hath brought all under one and the same head.\[115\]

**Pseudo-Dionysius**

Pseudo-Dionysius was a Christian philosopher and theologian during the late fifth and sixth centuries. Concerning the angelic host, he understood a two-fold argument for that what actually constituted angels as angels: first, the celestial creatures have a deep

\[111\] Chrysostom writes, “This blood, if rightly taken, driveth away devils, and keepeth them afar off from us, while it calleth to us Angels and the Lord of Angels. For wherever they see the Lord’s blood, devils flee, and Angels run together.” *Homily XLVI*, I.14.165.

\[112\] Chrysostom explains, “Everything that is spiritual brings the greatest gain, just as everything that is worldly the utmost loss. Let us then draw to us the invincible aid of the Spirit, by keeping the commandments, and then we shall be nothing inferior to the Angels.” Chrysostom, *Homily LXXV*, I.14.277.

\[113\] Chrysostom states,

Why should one speak of the wisdom of the commands, the excellency of the heavenly laws, the good ordering of the angelic polity? For such a life hath He proposed to us, such laws appointed for us, such a polity established, that those who put these things into practice, immediately become angels and like to God, as far as is in our power, even though they may have been worse than all men. (Chrysostom, *Homily XII*, I.14.41)

\[114\] Chrysostom writes, “What are ‘the powers of the world to come’? Life eternal, angelic conversation. Of these we have already received the earnest through our Faith from the Spirit.” Chrysostom, *Homily IX*, I.14.411-12.

and abiding participation in the divine, and second, because of their access to the divine, the angels pass along such revelation to all who proceed them, revelations which may otherwise be impossible to fully and completely understand. Therefore, these beings have been given the title “angel” or “messenger.”  

Pseudo-Dionysius explains, They have the first and the most diverse participation in the divine and they, in turn, provide the first and the most diverse revelations of the divine hiddenness. That is why they have a preeminent right to the title of angel or messenger, since it is they who pass on to us these revelations which are so far beyond us. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” in Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works, trans. Colm Luibheid [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988], 157)

Pseudo-Dionysius envisages the angels as categorized into an exacting hierarchy of three groups that each have three ranks. The first rank consists of the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones. The second rank consists of dominions, powers, and authorities. Finally, the third rank consists of principalities, archangels, and angels. If this hierarchy is supported in Scripture, then why does it so often simply refer to the angelic

Pseudo-Dionysius writes, As I have said already, those beings and those orders which are superior to us are also incorporeal. Their hierarchy belongs to the domain of the conceptual and is something out of this world. We see our human hierarchy, on the other hand, as our nature allows, pluralized in a great variety of perceptible symbols lifting us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization. The heavenly beings, because of their intelligence, have their own permitted conceptions of God, for us, on the other hand, it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Ecclesial Hierarchy,” in Pseudo-Dionysius, 197-98)

Pseudo-Dionysius explains, The first group is forever around God and is said to be permanently united with him ahead of any of the other and with no intermediary. Here, then, are the most holy “thrones” and the orders said to possess many eyes and wings, called in Hebrew the “cherubim” and “seraphim.” . . . The second group . . . is made up of “authorities,” “dominions,” and “powers.” And the third, at the end of the heavenly hierarchies, is the group of “angels,” “archangels,” and “principalities.” (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 160-62)
army as just “angels?” His answer to this question was that the more advanced ranks within the angelic hierarchy possess all the knowledge and power of the lower ranks, while the lower possess nothing of the higher. Therefore, the most elevated of the ranks are labeled “angels” since they possess all of the same commensurate power as the power. Equally, the lower ranks could be labeled as “seraphim” since they do not enjoy the attributes of the other ranks to which they are equated. A more simplistic clarification may be that the angels individually have power in both larger and lesser degrees to illuminate and conform to the image of the divine, which is, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, the primary angelic attribute. He comments,

In every sacred rank the higher orders have all the illuminations and powers of those below them and the subordinate have none of those possessed by their superiors. Theologians give the name “angel” also to the highest and holiest orders of the heavenly beings by virtue of the fact that they too make known the enlightenment proceeding from the Deity. . . . If scripture gives a shared name to all the angels, the reason is that all the heavenly powers hold as a common possession an inferior or superior capacity to conform to the divine and to enter into communion with the light coming from God.

What are the varied responsibilities of the diverse ranks of the angelic within the context of the creation event? According to Pseudo-Dionysius, the angels who abide in the uppermost ranks are richly blessed with instantaneous contact with God and receive from him perfection and illumination. The angelic names within the first rank mirror the manner through which they express their similarity to the divine. For example, the seraphim create a continual ring around God, and enflamed by their own movement they


120 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 74.


122 Pseudo-Dionysius states,
This first of the hierarchies is hierarchically ordered by truly superior beings, for this hierarchy possesses the highest order as God’s immediate neighbor, being grounded directly around God and receiving the primal theophanies and perfections. Hence the descriptions “carriers of warmth” and “thrones.” Hence, also, the title “outpouring of wisdom.” These names indicate their similarity to what God is. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 162-63)
purify and illumine those who fall within the lower ranks.\textsuperscript{123} The cherubim act as an “outpouring of wisdom,” obtaining the paramount portion of the light of God and incessantly consider this wisdom sharing it with all those who follow after them.\textsuperscript{124} Next, the thrones reside unceasingly in the presence of God and are completely open to God, suffering no possible deficiency due to this proximity to the divine.\textsuperscript{125} Acting in a cohesive unit, the first three ranks of angels, out of all other creatures, dwell the nearest to God and are therefore absolutely contemplative, completely pure, and as a result are “consumed by light that comes through direct contemplation of the divine.”\textsuperscript{126} Pseudo-Dionysius believed it was the purpose of these angels to be the first course of the light of God shining before all beings that follow them.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{123} Pseudo-Dionysius writes, 
For the designation seraphim really teaches this—a perennial circling around the divine things, penetrating warmth, the overflowing heat of a movement which never falters and never fails, a capacity to stamp their own image on subordinates by arousing and uplifting in them too a like flame, the same warmth. It means also the power to purify by means of lightning flash and flame. It means the ability to hold unveiled and undiminished both the light that they have and the illumination they give out. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 162)

\textsuperscript{124} Pseudo-Dionysius explains, “The name cherubim signifies the power to know and to see God, to receive the greatest gifts of his light, to contemplate the divine splendor in primordial power, to be filled with the gifts that bring wisdom and to share in these generously with subordinates as part of the beneficent outpouring of wisdom.” Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 162.

\textsuperscript{125} Pseudo-Dionysius states, 
The title of the most sublime and exalted thrones conveys that in them there is a transcendence over every earthly defect, as shown by their upward-bearing toward the ultimate heights, that they are forever separated from what is inferior, that they are completely intent upon remaining always and forever in the presence of him who is truly the most high, that, free of all passion and material concern, they are utterly available to receive the divine visitation, that they bear God and are every open, like servants, to welcome God. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 162)

\textsuperscript{126} Pseudo-Dionysius suggest, 
They are “contemplative” too, not because they contemplate symbols of the senses or the mind, or because they are uplifted to God by way of a composite contemplation of sacred writing, but, rather, because they are full of a superior light beyond any knowledge and because they are filled with a transcendent and triply luminous contemplation of the one who is the cause and the source of all beauty. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 164-65)

\textsuperscript{127} Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “When the first rank has directly and properly received its due understanding of God’s Word from the divine goodness itself, then it passes this on, as benefits a benevolent hierarchy, to those next in line.” Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 165.
Comprised of authorities, dominions, and powers, the second rank reveals to humanity the manner in which God should be imitated. The authorities disclose the order of creation to the other levels of the angelic hierarchy and lift the lower ranks to more lofty places.  

The authorities, as their name indicates, have an equal order with the divine dominions and powers. They are so placed that they can receive God in a harmonious and unconfused way and indicate the ordered nature of the celestial and intellectual authority. Far from employing their authoritative powers to do tyrannous harm to the inferiors, they are harmoniously and unfailingly uplifted toward the things of God and, in their goodness, they lift up with them the ranks of those inferior to them. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 166)

Next, the dominions reflect the governance set by God in creation and “point towards which they draw the lower orders.” These celestial beings exemplify the true courage and power of God, granting the necessary courage in order to not be fearful of God’s revelations as well as the strength and power to obey them, so that “the lower orders may be divinized.”

The revealing name “dominions” signifies, in my view, a lifting up which is free, unfettered by earthly tendencies and uninclined toward any of those tyrannical dissimilarities which characterize a harsh dominion. Because it does not give way to any defect, it is above any abject creation of slaves, and, innocent of any dissimilarity, it is forever striving mightily toward the true dominion and the true source of all dominion. Benevolently and in accordance with capacity, it receives—as does it subordinates—the semblance of that domination. It rejects empty appearances, returns completely to the true Lord, and shares as far as it can in that everlasting and divine source of all dominion. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 167)

As for the holy “powers,” the title refers to a kind of masculine and unshakable courage in all its godlike activities. It is a courage which abandons all laziness and softness during the reception of the divine enlightenments granted to it, and is powerfully uplifted to imitate God. Far from abandoning its godlike movement out of cowardice, it looks undeviatingly to that transcendent power which is the source of all power. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 168)

The principalities, archangels, and angels inhabit the third and final rank of angels. This rank is the assembly nearest to humanity and creation, and their responsibilities and powers are comprised from this position of closeness. Serving as princes, the principalities exercise “their powers to lead people to the King, God, and to impose future order.” Occupying a more middle ground, the archangels are a “mean
between extremes.” Their primary function is for the support and unity among all of the
angelic creatures and receive the power for such support from the principalities. In
addition, the archangels interpret and pass along divine illumination to the other angels
that descend through the other ranks.\textsuperscript{132} Finally, the “angels” are the creatures dwelling
the closest to human beings and are the final and most direct source of revelation and
illumination.\textsuperscript{133} Pseudo-Dionysius defines them as the beings most directly involved with
the overseeing of the hierarchies of humanity and the preparation of them for “transition
upwards to God.”\textsuperscript{134}

Although Pseudo-Dionysius presents a well-ordered structure to the angelic
hierarchy, he does not believe that the governance of the creation has been turned over by
God to the angels. Writing of the nation of Israel, he suggests that God reigns over the
nations but has nevertheless ordered the angels to be in charge of bringing humanity to

\begin{quote}
The term “heavenly principalities” refers to those who possess a godlike and princely hegemony,
with a sacred order most suited to princely power, the ability to be returned completely toward that
principle which is above all principles and to lead others to him like a prince, the power to receive to
the full the mark of the Principle of principles and, by their harmonious exercise of princely powers,
to make manifest this transcendent principle of all order. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial
Hierarchy,” 170)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} Pseudo-Dionysius states,
The holy archangels have the same order as the heavenly principalities and, as I have already
indicated, they join with the angels to form a single hierarchy and rank. Still, every hierarchy has
first, middle, and last powers, and the holy order of the archangels has something of both the others
by virtue of being a mean between extremes. Its relationship with the former derives from the fact
that like a principality it is returned to its transcendent principle [source], that it receives upon itself
as far as possible the mark of this principle, and that it brings about the unity of the angels, thanks to
those invisible powers of ordering and arranging which it has received from that principle. (Pseudo-
Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 170)

\textsuperscript{133} Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 92.

\textsuperscript{134} Pseudo-Dionysius explains,
As I have already said, the angels complete the entire ranking of the heavenly intelligences. Among
the heavenly beings it is they who possess the final quality of being an angel. For being closer to us,
they, more appropriately than the previous ones, are named ‘angels’ insofar as their hierarchy is more
concerned with revelation and is closer to the world. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,”
170-71)
salvation. He is careful to point out that the nation of Israel may be viewed as special in the plan of God because of their specific relationship with the angel Michael, and this example serves to indicate that earthly nations have individual angels assigned to them that they might realize the truth of God’s governance in order to fully acknowledge such heavenly rule. He writes, “For there is only one Providence over all the world, a supra-being transcending all power invisible and invisible,” and every nation has “presiding angels entrusted with the task of raising up toward that Providence.” Therefore, the ultimate angelic task is to advance all of creation upwards to God. He says, “Then by this [first] rank [of angels] the second one, and by the second the third, and by the third our hierarchy is hierarchically uplifted . . . toward that source beyond every source and consummation of all harmony.” However, Pseudo-Dionysius makes clear that the success of the angels in this endeavor does not bring them the ultimate joy and happiness experienced by humanity. The joy designated within the Bible, he states, is actually a joy experienced in the salvation of unbelievers. The angels share in this well-being and joy, and as a result are “unspeakably happy at God’s generosity.”

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135 Pseudo-Dionysius suggests,
For there is only one ruling source and Providence in the world, and we must not imagine that the Deity took charge of the Jewish people alone and that angels or gods, on an equal footing with him or even hostile to him, had charge of the other peoples. The passage which might suggest this notion must be understood in this sacred sense, for it could not mean that God shared the government of mankind with other gods or angels or that he reigned in Israel as a local prince or chieftain. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 172)


138 Pseudo-Dionysius writes,
Finally, I must explain something about what scripture intends in the reference to the joy of the heavenly ranks. Now these ranks could never experience the pleasures we draw from the passions. The reference therefore is to the way they participate in the divine joy caused by the finding of the lost. They undergo a truly divine sense of well-being, the good and generous delight at the providence and salvation of those who are returned to God. They are unspeakably happy in the way that, occasionally, sacred men are happy when God arranges for divine enlightenments to visit them. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 190)
In contrast to the other patristic theologians, Pseudo-Dionysius fails to address the issue of the actual creation event of the angelic host. Instead, he emphasizes the vast number of angels mentioned in the Bible actually reveals that the true number is inconceivable: “So numerous indeed are the blessed armies of transcendent intelligent beings that they surpass the fragile and limited realm of our physical numbers.\textsuperscript{139} A dissimilarity also exists between Pseudo-Dionysius and Chrysostom regarding the relationship between angels and humans.\textsuperscript{140} Pseudo-Dionysius presents the angels in this relationship as being fairly static. This collaboration is recognized as the angelic passing on of the revelations and illuminations of God.

In \textit{The Celestial Hierarchy}, Pseudo-Dionysius suggests that Scripture sometimes gives the title “angel” to humans. Emphasizing that beings on higher levels, which possess all of the capacities and characteristics of their subordinates, have such capacities and characteristics reflected within their subordinates. Therefore, he believed that there was no forbidding within Scripture of human beings being designated as within the same category as an angel. After all, humans are imitators and messengers of the same angelic mission to bring revelation.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} Pseudo-Dionysius states, I think we also ought to reflect on the tradition in scripture that the number of a thousand times a thousand and ten thousand times ten thousand. These numbers, enormous to us, square and multiply themselves and thereby indicate clearly that the ranks of the heavenly beings are innumerable. So numerous indeed are the blessed armies of transcendent intelligent beings that they surpass the fragile and limited realm of our physical numbers. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 181)

\textsuperscript{140} Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 92.

\textsuperscript{141} Pseudo-Dionysius explains, This is something which can rightly be said of all the divinely intelligent beings, and just as the first possess, in a complete fashion, the holy attributes of their subordinates, so too do the latter possess those of their superiors, though not in the same way but in a humbler mode. Hence, I see nothing wrong in the fact that the Word of God calls even our hierarch an “angel,” for it is characteristic of him that like the angels he is, to the extent of which he is capable, a messenger and that he is raised up to imitate, so far as a man may, the angelic power to bring revelation. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” 176-77)
Nevertheless, a significant distinction exists between humans and angels. As has already been stated, Pseudo-Dionysius presents the hierarchy of angels as “conceptual” and “something out of this world.” The angels enjoy their own suitable conceptions of God. However, human beings, as far as their capacity allows, rely on observable images to elevate them hierarchically to divine contemplation and to God.\footnote{Pseudo-Dionysius writes, Of course, as I have said already, those beings and those orders which are superior to us are also incorporeal. Their hierarchy belongs to the domain of the conceptual and is something out of this world. We see our human hierarchy, on the other hand, as our nature allows, pluralized in a great variety of perceptible symbols lifting us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization. The heavenly beings, because of their intelligence, have their own permitted conceptions of God. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” 197-98)}

Very little is said about a collaboration between the angels and the church within the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. What he does suggest is that the primary manner through which angels intermingle with the church is by attending as a source of illumination. He expounds in *The Celestial Hierarchy*:

The most holy hierarchy among the beings of heaven possesses the native sacramental power of a most completely immaterial conception of God and of things divine. It is their lot to be as like God and as imitative of God as is possible. These first beings around God lead others and with their light guide them toward this sacred perfection. To the sacred orders farther down the scale they generously bestow, in proportion to their capacity, the knowledge of the workings of God, knowledge forever made available as a gift to themselves by that divinity which is absolute perfection and which is the source of wisdom for the divinely intelligent beings. The ranks coming in succession to these premier beings are sacredly lifted up by their mediation to enlightenment in the sacred workings of the divinity. They form the orders of initiates and they are named as such. In succession to this heavenly and transcendent hierarchy the divinity extends its most sacred gifts into our domain and, in the words of scripture, it deals with us as though we were “babes.”\footnote{Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” 234-35.}

Within all the hierarchical ranks, the greater levels act as mediators of God’s divine light, activity, and order. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the transition from ecclesial hierarchy to angelic hierarchy proves to be no obstacle. The higher ranks of both ecclesiarchy and angelic are occupied by beings with more “godlike” minds that are sharper to disclose the
illumination of God to the lower ranks to the extent commensurate with the capacities of those ranks, and in doing so without jealously and graciously lifting them up to God.\textsuperscript{144}

**Conclusion**

In the patristic era, theologians and Christian thinkers were more concerned with \textit{who} the angels are than \textit{what} the angels are. Undoubtedly, each theologian aligned himself with the position of angels being spiritual beings. Inclined to ignore the angelic nature, Augustine thought this subject was so mysterious that this was something which could never be truly comprehended. Chrysostom presented very few remarks vis-à-vis the angelic nature. For all his postulating regarding the angels as messengers of divine illumination, Pseudo-Dionysius claimed that the angelic nature of hierarchical existence requires that they be spiritual beings. Instead, the patristic writers comprehensively explored angelic relationships.

The Church Fathers varied on the angels’ interaction among one another, their interaction with God, and their interaction with humanity. Augustine examined the relationship between the angelic and humanity in his \textit{De Civitate Dei}. Chrysostom was concerned with urging his readers to emulate the angels that true union between them could be established. Pseudo-Dionysius’s angelology was founded on the complexities of the angelic hierarchy and how the angels mediate divine illumination with God, themselves, and humanity. In conclusion, understanding the nature of angels within the patristic era was an exploration of the nature of their varied relationships.

\textsuperscript{144} Pseudo-Dionysius suggests, It is therefore the task of the first ranks of those beholding God to reveal fittingly and without jealousy to those of second rank the sacred sights which they behold. To initiate others into the hierarchy is the task of those who have with perfect understanding learned the divine secret of all that has to do with their hierarchy and to whom the power of sacramental initiation has been granted. (Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” 236)
CHAPTER 3

MEDIEVAL ANGELOLOGY AND JONATHAN EDWARDS

The angels contribute to the glory of God in an eminent way, and as intelligent and voluntary agents, they bear a likeness to [God] in their operations as well as in their substance.¹

Thomas Aquinas

The medieval period of church history is littered with angels. For the medieval theologians, the question of who was only able to be answered by first addressing the question of what—relationships of the angelic could only give rise when dictated by angelic nature. Angelology provided an ideal context for discussing issues such as the structure of the universe, the metaphysical texture of creatures, and theories of time, knowledge, freedom, and linguistics. The medieval mind was obsessed with the mysterious fine points about angelology. Prior to the Reformation, practically every imaginable question about angels was a subject of debate at one point or another. However, rising from discussion regarding the medieval understanding of angels are numerous questions. Where, if anywhere, did God create the angels? Are the spiritual angels subject to time and change as physical bodies are? Did God create the evil angels? Why did they turn from God? Did time elapse between their creation and their fall? Why did the persevering angels not fall? Medieval theologians explored these and other questions in great depth in occasional treatises. For instance, Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), devoted his work, De Casu Diaboli, to answering the questions surrounding the fall of Satan.² Anselm concluded that the fall of the angels had left such a radical imperfection in the originally


perfect cosmos that the creation would have to wait until the end of time for its proper restoration. In addition to Anselm, the theologians mentioned in this chapter make a significant contribution to angelology.

Jonathan Edwards’ approach to angels lay somewhere between that of medieval theologians Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. Grounding his understanding of the celestial real within the exegesis of Scripture, Edwards, like many theologians before him, was willing to speculate in his investigation of these mysterious heavenly creatures. Edwards angelology, as I examine in the subsequent chapters, was traditional in its focus on the three standard medieval themes of creation, fall, and confirmation. From the patristic era to the medieval period, the functions and responsibilities of these creatures in the Genesis creation account were repeatedly investigated. Three quaestiones of Aquinas’ Summa Theologia is dedicated to the subject. Over half of Bonaventure’s Breviloquium and Commentary on the Sentences scrutinize the particulars of these three eras of creation, fall, and confirmation regarding the angelic host. These three themes establish the indispensable point of departure for understanding the angels, what their functions might be, and their characteristics. Like the medieval theologians, Edwards investigated the creation, fall, confirmation, characteristics, and purpose of the angels within this framework. The reasons such emphasis was placed upon these celestial beings was that human beings are nearest to the angels, and anthropology is illuminated through a study of angelology.

Despite New England Puritanism’s affinity with scholastic modes of reason, the great “angelic Doctor,” Thomas Aquinas, appears nowhere in the library “Catalogue” or the “Account Book” of Jonathan Edwards. However, this does not mean Edwards never encountered the writings of Aquinas. The Yale Library catalogue of 1742 lists the

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4 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 16.
Summa Theologiae, and Jonathan’s grandfather, Solomon Stoddard owned several Thomistic works. Therefore, it is highly probable that Jonathan would have encountered the theological works of Thomas Aquinas, but like many of his Puritan forebears, Edwards invoked Aquinas only disparagingly. This chapter explores the angelology of some of the greatest theologians and thinkers of the Medieval period of church history. Though he may not have read many of these writers, Edwards undoubtedly drew from the same historic tradition in the formation of his own angelology.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Medieval theologian Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was not as prolific in his discussion of angels and readily repeats the views and opinions of Augustine. As was true in the centuries proceeding him regarding the science of angelology, Bernard was not concerned to greatly innovate his positions and theological views. As a result, the writings of Bernard regarding angels are limited in scope and number. He was content to stress, “Now we prefer to know nothing more than that which we already know by faith.”

On occasion, Bernard provides comments regarding the basic questions of the existence of angels and their characteristics, but such observations are tremendously brief and have no metaphysical content. Like the church fathers, angels were not as vital in Bernard’s theology simply because of their existence. He was concerned with the role the angels play within the greater soteriological drama performed within creation. When Bernard’s works are carefully studied, it becomes quite clear that within the context of

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6 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 72-73.

7 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 81-82.

his mention of the subject of angels, he does so in an almost “creedal” method. In *On Consideration*, he writes,

> We have ascertained through reading and we hold through faith that the citizens there [the heavenly Jerusalem] are powerful spirits glorious and blessed; they are distinct persons, arranged in order of dignity, established from the beginning, in their order of rank, perfect in what they are, ethereal in body, endowed with immortality, not created impassible but made so, that is by grace not nature; pure of mind, with kind disposition, devoutly pious, wholly chaste, individual but unanimous, secure in peace, formed by God and dedicated to divine praise and service.\(^9\)

Contrasting the mainstream scholastics, who were contemporaries of Bernard and those who precede him, he used no formally recognized tools of analysis, argumentation, or logic in his deliberation of what the angels are.\(^10\) He believed that unraveling the mysteries surrounding the angelic beings undermined the entire design and purpose of faith and could even possibly be dangerous. This perspective fashioned the root of his opposition to the work of certain scholastics, particularly the work of Peter Abelard (1079-1142).\(^11\)

Believing in some form of hierarchy among the angelic host, Bernard carefully crafted his own structure. His organization did not follow that of Pseudo-Dionysius, which had become popular when examining the angels—Bernard turned to Gregory the Great (540–604) in his hierarchical system. This choice may have functioned as a direct and implicit criticism of the scholastics who were so captivated with Pseudo-Dionysius.\(^12\)

Again, Bernard writes in *On Consideration*,

> God loves in the Seraphim as charity, knows in the Cherubim as truth, is seated in the Thrones as equity, reigns in the Dominations as majesty, rules in the Principalities


\(^{10}\) Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 85.

\(^{11}\) Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 78.

as principle, guards in the Powers as salvation, acts in the Virtues as strength, reveals in the Archangels as light, assists in the Angels as piety.\textsuperscript{13}

When compared with the hierarchy devised by Pseudo-Dionysius, there are some distinct differences. The Dionysian order suggests that the path of interaction and revelation is wholly linear: the separate ranks act in the same basic fashion upon the next lower steps, until only the final step interacts with humanity and the material world.\textsuperscript{14} The angels are organized within Bernard’s are more likely to directly interact with the material world because each structure fulfills varying functions and purposes within their own ranking scheme. Furthermore, the Dionysian chief concern lies within the development and dissemination of illumination, and viewed the angels as copiously employed in that work. In contrast, the concern within Bernard’s system was the method used to contact and serve humanity by the ministers of the varied kinds of angels.\textsuperscript{15}

Bernard of Clairvaux, like Chrysostom before him, recognized that the angels were both agents of protection and destruction.\textsuperscript{16} Though he did not follow Pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard emphasized angels as mediators of divine illumination. Bernard employs the use of Song of Songs in his argumentation for illumination being derived from the angels. In Song of Songs 1:10, “We will make you golden earrings, inlaid with silver” (Vulgate),\textsuperscript{17} Bernard said the “we” in this passage are the angels and the “earrings” serve as the sensations and images of the spiritual realm that the angels deliver to humanity as they receive visions from God. In addition to delivering the vision, the angels also supply the suitable words needed for the individual to describe this experience to others.


\textsuperscript{14} Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 80.

\textsuperscript{15} Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 58.

\textsuperscript{16} Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{17} Song of Songs 1:11: “We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver.”
According to Bernard, these visions are signs of the soul’s preparation for union with God. The uniqueness of Bernard’s view regarding the soul’s divine illumination is that he confidently associates illumination to union with God. This link is plainly documented within his biblical exegesis. For Bernard, a chasm exists between God and man due to the fall. The bridge fixing this chasm between the divine and fallen are the angels. Ultimately, Bernard indicates that the “same Christ was given to humanity as He was to the angels.” Therefore, as attending spirits, the angelic host protectively guards the spiritual members of the church, defending, shaping, and aiding them for their final presentation to Christ. Bernard believed the angels attend humans who spend time in prayer and it is through their mediatorial work that the requests of humanity are presented before God. Bernard claimed that angelic visitations are exclusively for the most dedicated and holy Christians. As an example, he points to Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141), who reported to have heard angelic singing.

The manner in which humanity and angels interrelate and in what ways they are alike and different encompassed the primary emphasis of Bernard’s angelology, specifically within the context of his sermon on Song of Songs. According to Bernard, angels and humans were not significantly different. In fact, he says, “The splendor of an

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18 Keck states, “Bernard’s conception of the Bride as already a union of angels and humans allows the abbot to ascribe a role for the Bridegroom’s companions which other exegetes of the Song of Songs did not explore.” Keck, Angels and Angelology, 198.


23 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 193.
angel and the splendor of a soul are one and the same.”24 In his Song of Songs sermons, Bernard identifies the angels as spirits who are “more sublime in their existence than those creatures on the earth, clothed in flesh as they are.”25 He suggests that the accomplishment of Christ on behalf of humanity during his incarnation had already been achieved in heaven on behalf of the angelic host, but not in the sense that Christ redeemed them from being fallen.26 The wisdom, holiness, redemption, and righteousness of Christ had enabled the holy angels not to fall and guarded them from actually falling.27

Humanity changed significantly after the fall of man. The prelapsarian first parents, Adam and Eve, possessed divine likeness, the *imago dei*, and therefore were able to provide angelic companionship.28 After the fall, the semblance of humanity was more like a beast than an angel, and therefore had more in common with animals than with the angelic.29 As a result, humanity relies upon the angels for the revelation of divine truth. According to Bernard, angels unceasingly preserve the truth revealed by faith and hold such truths until such a time as the believer is able to understand them.30 He contends that revelation is the genesis of mystical visions. When an individual has a “transportative experience,” that vision will contain earthly symbols in order that the human being might better understand the vision or lessen its divine harshness to the senses of humanity. The angels are the agents through which this divine light is mediated through these earthly

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symbols, aiding humanity to easily understand the vision.\textsuperscript{31} The angels are also employed when the individual who experienced the vision relates the content of the vision to the rest of the church. In this event, Bernard affirmed, the angels inspire the clarity of their speech to be understandable to the remainder of the congregation.\textsuperscript{32} In addition, Bernard believed that praying Christians participate in the angelic company and the angels take their prayers and deliver them to God.\textsuperscript{33}

Bernard believed the hierarchy residing in heaven is an impeccable archetypal for ecclesiastical hierarchy. He devotes much exploration on this particular issue in \textit{On Consideration}.\textsuperscript{34} He saw the varied ranks of angels who are assembled under one God corresponding with the various ecclesial ranks organized under one Pope. Those in lower clerical ranks should not “chafe under their superiors; for one never hears angels completing about being under the archangels.”\textsuperscript{35}

The angels are also present within the worship of the people of God and see a threefold cooperation between God, angels, and men. In Sermon 78 of his exposition of the Song of Songs, he said, “In treating of this great mystery, which the teacher of the Gentiles interpreted as the holy and chaste union of Christ and his Church, the very work of our salvation, I find three agents cooperating together: God, and angel, and man.”\textsuperscript{36} In essence, as humanity raises their voices in melodies of worship and praise, the angelic host is present to transmit those praises to God and then return delivering God’s blessings upon

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{33} Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 169-70.
    \item \textsuperscript{34} Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 88.
    \item \textsuperscript{35} Bernard, \textit{Five Books on Consideration}, 102-3; Bernard, \textit{De Consideratione}, 731.
\end{itemize}
the worshippers. In other words, the angels “join the earthly church in song.” Bernard suggests, that the angels join with the church in worship because of the similarity that exists with their songs of worship in heaven. The church adores, worships, and loves one Christ, just as the angels, and do so even when residing within a physical body. However, the church still residing on earth should never feel as if they are lacking when compared to the church assembled in heaven, even though, Bernard believed, nine choirs of angels inhibit the church. It is only the degree of bliss that exists that properly defines the distinction between the two types of believers and the two churches on earth and in heaven. The angels are constantly at work attending humanity out of a well of desire and love to participate in the delight and glory they enjoy with the church remaining on the earth. Bernard considered it was a false distinction to suggest any spiritual partition between the heavenly church and the earthly church. He argues that in Christ the two exist as the same church. While inhabiting the earth, humanity receives admittance to Christ through the understandable means of holy books and other people as they strive to find God. On the other hand, angels receive the fullness of Christ because of their proximity with God and their unfallen nature. But, as Bernard points out, both groups receive the same Christ and this same Christ unites the two together. In Sermon 27 he writes,

> Just as he wished to form one flock of the scattered flocks of sheep, that there might be one flock and one shepherd, so, although from the beginning he had for bride the multitude of angels, it pleased him to summon the Church from among men and unite it with the one from heaven, that there might be but the one bride and one Bridegroom. The one from heaven perfects the earthly one; it does not make two. . . .

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38 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 86.


Their likeness makes them one, one now in their similar purpose, one herafter in the same glory.  

Bernard also uses terminology to suggest he believed humanity can become angelic. However, in distinction from the views of Chrysostom, this transformative process only takes place after the death of a believer. He said when believers die, they become a member of the angelic chorus. It is not as if the believer becomes a “lesser angel” at death and enters at a low position within the angelic hierarchy, in fact, the believer becomes “equal in authority to the angels themselves.”

Peter Lombard

Peter Lombard (1100–1160), a scholastic theologian and Bishop of Paris, identifies two rational beings as being created by God: “The angels, pure spirits who are not necessarily united to bodies; and souls, which are.” Certain questions or inquiries into the angelic realm are meet by Lombard as “exceedingly profound and obscure.” For example, as to the possession of bodies by the angels, either spiritual bodies or physical bodies assumed when they appear to humanity, Lombard does not make any argument of his own but rather appeals to the theology of Augustine.

Lombard is cautious to emphasize that even though the angels’ existence is a spiritual existence, they were not created prior to the creation of other spirits. This position is explored from two sides of the spectrum: Augustine, who held to the position that angels were not created by God prior to the beginning of time; and Jerome (347–420),

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46 Lombard, Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae, 1:368.
who postulated a “time before time” in which the angels exist. Lombard chooses Augustine as his teacher in such matters and affirms the creation of the angelic beings together with all the other elements of the creation event—heaven, earth, and time. In addition, Lombard believed the angels were created in tandem with the empyrean heaven, their dwelling place, prior to the fall of Lucifer.\(^{48}\) He also held the position that all angels were created as good creatures.\(^{49}\)

Lombard relies heavily upon Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) to form his view of the fall of the angels, writing, “The angels who remained with God had been given cooperating grace (\textit{gratia cooperans}), which impelled them from a basic goodness towards the perfect goodness of complete love and submission to God.”\(^{50}\) However, this divine grace must not be implicit in the bestowing of beatitude upon the angels. Lombard suggests that what this grace performed was to allow the angels to exist within a “blessed manner.” By the virtue of the services they perform on behalf of humanity, true blessedness is merited by the angels.\(^{51}\) Lombard once again agrees with the assessment of Augustine believing that having been confirmed, the holy angels who did not fall in the rebellion of Lucifer, were confirmed and are no longer capable of sinning.\(^{52}\)

Regardless of what Gregory might argue, Lombard postulates the belief that angels, even after their confirmation, are still capable of growth and change. After this holy confirmation, the beatitude, he writes, “Is ever increasing, as they grow more in love of God and service to humanity.”\(^{53}\) For example, the angels understand the Christ’s


\(^{50}\) Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:353.


\(^{52}\) Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:360-61.

incarnation more fully after its occurrence in history than they did beforehand.\textsuperscript{54} While the angels certainly advance in their knowledge of things after their confirmation by Christ, such as the incarnation event, they will eternally mature in their Trinitarian understanding.\textsuperscript{55}

Lombard divides the angels into the meticulous hierarchical structure in similarity to Pseudo-Dionysus.\textsuperscript{56} Each of the ranks is fashioned by angels who share in comparable gifts of both nature and grace.\textsuperscript{57} However, regarding the particular orders of the angels, Lombard relies greatly upon Gregory. The Cherubim possess the “fullness of knowledge,” the Seraphim “enflame,” and the Thrones are so occupied with the grace that God has chosen to exercise his judgment through them. The rank of Dominations superintends the Principalities who administer God’s orders, while the Powers vehemently support humanity against demonic powers. Finally, the Virtues perform miracles and signs, the Archangels proclaim “greater things,” and the Angels, the final rank, announce “lesser ones.”\textsuperscript{58} The identification of these ranks flow out of varied graces through which each angel participates—some superior to others. Lombard emphasizes that such identities are not given to the angels for their own sake but for the sake of understanding among humanity.\textsuperscript{59} Nevertheless, the graces that define the varied ranks and orders were not fully developed, Lombard says, until after the fall of Lucifer and were part and parcel of the confirmation of the holy angels that remained in heaven after the rebellion.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:383.
\item Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:383.
\item Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:371.
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\item Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:371.
\item Lombard, \textit{Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae}, 1:374.
\end{thebibliography}
All angels can be potentially dispatched by God to perform his bidding regardless of which rank they belong. The lesser orders, the angels and archangels, are at greater frequency than the higher ranks. Lombard suggests that when performing such tasks, the superior orders take on the identity of “angels.” He bases this deduction within his exegetical understanding of Psalm 103:4, which he translates as meaning “that these beings are spirits according to their natures, who then become angels or messengers.”

Lombard focuses on the benefit of angelic guardians in how he views the relationship between humanity and angels. He affirmed that each individual has a good angel guarding and urging him or her on to spiritual goodness. On the other hand, Lombard also believed each person has an evil angel specifically given the task to assault him or her. He says, “This is not to say that each angel only has a single charge, a particular angel could have several.” He also argues that a tenth rank of the angelic host will be shaped from the number of righteous humanity. Rather than the establishment of a new rank occupied by humanity, the vacancies within the various levels of angels will be filled by humans. Collectively, these replacements should be identified as a “tenth order.” In addition, he appeals to Augustine who believed the number of “redeemed humans may equal the same number of fallen angels.”

Only briefly does Lombard allude to the correlation between the angels and the church in his *Sentences*. Appealing to the previous authorities on this subject, Lombard is clear regarding the prominence of the angels within the life and function of the church, predominantly during the exercise of worship. Appealing to Gregory, Lombard suggests

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64 Lombard, *Sententiane in IV Libris Distinctae*, 1:376.
65 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 94.
that at the exact instant the host is transformed at the altar before the priest during the Mass, the angels are tasked with “carrying the body of Christ to heaven and share in it.”

Referring to Augustine, Lombard believes that the Mass should be recognized as a heavenly event, namely a “heavenly event,” as the angels carry the offering to the altar of God in heaven. He goes one step further in repeating the words of Augustine that the angelic participation and presence within the event of the Mass must be correctly and properly celebrated. While Lombard does not dedicate any serious consideration to the angelic and ecclesiological relationship, he nonetheless points to its vital importance.

**Bonaventure**

Bonaventure (1221–1274) was known as the “Doctor Seraphicus.” He taught at the University of Paris and was a friend to Thomas Aquinas. Though Scripture was not his only source helping to shape his angelology, Bonaventure affirmed that substantial proof was available to confirm the existence of angels. Previously, theologians and philosophers had observed proof of the motion of the planets in the universe. Bonaventure perceived the universe as the perfection of God, a perfection established on the manifestation of God’s goodness, wisdom, and power. As a result, he reasoned that within such a perfection that three types of beings must exist: spiritual (the angels), physical (the material creation), and the combination of both spiritual and physical (humanity). A universe without these three times, Bonaventure asserts, would not be perfect, therefore the angels are requiritur.

Relying on his cosmological understanding of the creation account in Genesis, Bonaventure follows the same path in investigating the creation of the angelic throngs.

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According to Etienne Gilson in *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, Bonaventure believed it was fitting for God to construct patterns of all varied types of creatures within the first moments of the creation event. Christopher Samuel suggests that the first actions of creation produced (1) angels, as the first spiritual creatures, (2) empyrean heaven, as the first active corporeal substance, (3) matter, as the first passive corporeal substance, and (4) time, as the first measure.\(^70\) The divine order of creation required this instantaneous quadruple creation. As the supreme and most perfect beings, the angels were created first. It is also important to note that the angels were created to coincide with this divine order, their perfection required them to dwell in a place for them to be in proper relationship with everything else. This necessity gave way to the creation of the empyrean heaven in which the angels dwell. However, according to Bonaventure, since the realm of empyrean heaven would be disordered if it remained void, corporeal matter was created to fill it.\(^71\) Correspondingly, creatures essentially exist according to the duration that can be measured; therefore, time was brought by God into existence.\(^72\) Bonaventure comments, “Thus the angels rightly appeared first by reason of their perfection, and it is in consequence of a concomitant necessity that their place, the content of their place and the duration of the whole were created simultaneously.”\(^73\)

While it is correct to affirm the creation of the angels within a realm of perfection and excellence, they do not continue in that way, and Bonaventure reflects on this occasion:

> We must know that, at the very instant of their creation, the angels were endowed with four perfections: simplicity of essence; individuality of person; rationality implying memory, intelligence, and will; and freedom of choice for the election of

\(^70\) Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 79.

\(^71\) Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 79.


good and the rejection of evil. These four main attributes are accompanied by four others: virtuosity in action, dedication in service, acuteness in understanding, and immutability in the choice of good or evil.\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 34; Bonaventure, “The Breviloquium,” in \textit{The Works of Bonaventure}, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970), 2:86, 5:224.}

The most problematic proved to be this final characteristic. Bonaventure posits that the angels who fell suffered under the sin of pride,\footnote{Bonaventure, “Liber II Sententiarum,” 2:146.} while the angels who retained their original state of goodness were confirmed by God and continued to reside in glory.\footnote{Bonaventure, “The Breviloquium,” 5:225.} Bonaventure insists that both good and fallen angels possessed comprehension of the consequences of their decision. David Keck writes, “Their freedom, knowledge, and responsibility are inseparable and sufficient,” yet the fallen wicked angels freely fell.\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 24.}

Additionally, the good angels retained their hierarchical positions, which became permanent as a result of God’s confirming action.\footnote{Bonaventure, “The Breviloquium,” 5:266.} Bonaventure contends that the evil angels, because of the nature of angelic will, will remain evil forever because this was their first choice, whereas the holy angels have been “perfected and completed” in their confirmation, which was essentially a “transformation from sinlessness to perfection.”\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 24; Bonaventure, “The Breviloquium,” 5:225.}

Following the logic of Hugh of St. Victor, Bonaventure did not believe the angels experienced full grace at the instant of their creation. However, he did not dismiss the idea that perhaps they were created with some “manner of grace.”\footnote{Bonaventure, “Liber II Sententiarum,” 2:133.}

Bonaventure hesitates in his reflection on angels regarding the subject of their hierarchy. Rather than framing a firm methodical approach to the hierarchy, the explanation of what hierarchies are and the narration of the hierarchy itself was sufficient.
According to Keck, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas part ways on this subject as Aquinas applies this method to the task of understanding the angelic hierarchical structure. They agree on the name of the ranks and both admit their conflict with the Gregorian and Dionysian ranking system by contending that Dionysius surveyed the question through the lens of angelic nature and essence, while Gregory was more concerned with angelic functions on the varying levels.

Still, Bonaventure adds his own advances to the hierarchical conversation. His position presents the angels as the penultimate of the creatures of God, and therefore they serve as the perfect image of creation itself. Bonaventure said their hierarchy, which is structured in three sets of three ranks within three hierarchies, is a reflection of the nature of the triune God. Gilson describes Bonaventure as organizing the nine separate orders in accordance to each of the persons of the holy Trinity:

The order which corresponds to the Father in Himself is the order of the Thrones; that which corresponds to the Father in the Son is the order of Cherubim; that which corresponds to the Father in the Holy Spirit is that of Seraphim. The order of the Son in the Father is called that of Dominions, whose functions are to command and to reign. The order of the Son in Himself is called that of the Virtues, and that of the Son in the Holy Spirit that of the Powers. The order of the Holy Spirit in the Father is called that of the Principalities, that of the Holy Spirit in the Son that of the Archangels; the order of the Holy Spirit in Himself is called that of the Angels.

Keck suggests Bonaventure connects these nine angelic orders with ecclesiastical hierarchy:

Laypeople, those most concerned with temporal affairs, correspond to the lowest orders of angels—the angels, archangels, and principalities. Clerics, who must minister to laypeople as well as pray, correspond to the middle orders of angels—the powers, virtues, and dominations. Finally, the religious occupy the highest triad,


and here Bonaventure reveals his ultimate views on the roles of Francis and the Franciscans in the economy of salvation.\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 147; Bonaventure, “Collationes in Hexaëmeron,” 5:440-41.}

Bonaventure did not affirm the ability of the angels to create, however, they are like a potter who creates a vessel from preexisting materials, but they are never able to create \textit{ex nihilo}. Instead, Bonaventure focuses more on the angel’s function of governing the temporal aspects of creation.\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 203.} Like Bernard, Bonaventure links the visitation of angels, for the comfort of those experiencing suffering within humanity, to the holiness of the individual. Providing the example of St. Francis who was ill and “craved soothing music,” he writes that “the angels themselves came to play at Francis’ bedside, due to his great holiness and purity.”\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 193; Bonaventure, “Legenda Maior sancti Francisci,” in College of St. Bonaventura, \textit{Opera Omnia}, 8:519.} Bonaventure considered the whole angelic community as constantly ministering to each person. Exegeting Genesis 32:1-3, where Jacob experiences an angelic visitation, Bonaventure receives comfort in this event, “discovering from this passage that the faithful should not be the fearful, for we have the Lord and the angels about us.”\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 34; Bonaventure “Collationes in Hexaëmeron,” 5:412.}

In this investigation into the relationship between angels and humanity, Bonaventure did not believe angels could create human bodies for themselves, for this would “violate not only the divine economy but also the laws of nature.” Therefore, the bodies humanity perceives as possessed by the angels are “merely effigies.”\footnote{Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 32; Bonaventure, “Liber II Sententiarum,” 2:214.} While the angels have no necessity of physical bodies, they understand the lack of interaction that would take place between them and humanity if it were not for their assuming physical...
form. Therefore, angels undertake these physical frames as the means in which effectual
and interactive communication can be performed in their ministry to humanity.91

Keck identifies new questions arising regarding the role of guardian angels
during the medieval period, specifically regarding the extent to which angels play a role in
the salvation of humanity, free will, and the vital relationship between grace and nature.92
Bonaventure contributes to this discussion by denying the reality of the role of angels
within the event of salvation: “In no way does angelic assistance impede or even effect
human free will. . . . Guardian angels do not erode a person’s merit through their assistance;
the angels aid humanity, but the impact of human choice and the rewards received remain
the same.”93 This position, Bonaventure trusts, preserves the singular role of God in human
salvation.94 The angel’s work in salvation is within the confines of God’s “cooperating
grace rather than in operating grace.” While the angel cannot save the individual,
Bonaventure states that they participate in the work of the believer for various reasons:
“their love of God, their desire to see humanity saved, and their hope for the repair and
reinforcement of the angelic hierarchies.”95

In addition, Bonaventure supposed guardian angels were assigned by God to
individuals at the moment of conception.96 This was due to the fact that he thought the soul
of man could experience temptation as early as the moment of birth. This custodianship
of angels, however, does not guarantee the salvation of the individual. Thus, the question
arose as to whether the guardian angel of a person who never experiences salvation

92 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 162.
95 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 162.
96 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 160.
would feel despair upon the death of the one to which they were assigned. Bonaventure replied by asserting the joy and contentment experienced by angels was so comprehensive that they are unable to experience any despair at all—a joy that is the “substantial reward of heaven.” Neither does the “accidental joy, that comes from created beings,” minimize because of the damnation of the individual. However, Bonaventure said, “The angel’s charge’s salvation can increase the angel’s joy.”

Bonaventure strongly believed in the interaction between the angels and humanity. In his sermon for the Feast of Mary Magdalene, Bonaventure presented the angels as having a central role within the context of human comfort. He preached that while the angels may not shed tears, they do translate the fears of the faithful to God, and in doing so connect human grief to the Father. In Isaiah 6, when the prophet experienced the purification by the Seraph, Bonaventure took consolation in seeing God move through ministers to purge away sin from the lives of believers. Therefore, a believer should be willing to “imitate the lives of not only those who had seen the angels, and to imitate Abraham, so quickly moved to host his angelic visitors in true hospitality.” Like Chrysostom, Bonaventure was sensible to the manner in which humanity could imitate the angels and therefore live an “angelic life.” To live such a life, he presented the possibility of living a monastic life, but even this did not always ensure an angelic life. In a sermon delivered to a congregation of Beguines, he called on them to “live lives of obedience and moral and physical purity, as do the angels.”

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experiencing the angelic life was not merely confined to physical existence. In Bonaventure’s *Soliloquy*, he equates the soul of the believer after death with the angels, therefore repeating the position that said the glorified saints will enter into the angelic hierarchy at death.\(^{101}\) He encourages believers to contemplate the angels: “For in some ways you resemble them by your nature, and you will be their companion in glory.”\(^{102}\)

Like others before him, Bonaventure contemplated the relationship of the church and angels to that of worship. He recognized the presence of angels within the context of Christian worship specifically during times of prayer, observing, “In prayer we speak to God, hear Him, and converse with the angels as if we were living an angelic life.”\(^{103}\) In turn, the angels deliver those prayers to the triune God and allow reconciliation to take place. Bonaventure also said that humanity was able to pray to the angels and request their assistance and their intercession on their behalf.\(^{104}\)

Central within the theology of the medieval angelologists was highlighting the types of tasks humanity could participate in and accomplish alongside the angels. The Mass was emphasized as the time when humans and angels interact with one another. When Bonaventure referenced the Seraphim crying out, “Holy! Holy! Holy!,” the thoughts of the people would immediately be drawn toward the liturgy.\(^{105}\) In a sermon delivered on the Feast of St. Michael, Bonaventure teaches that humanity should praise God by joining their voices in song with the angels, demonstrating the importance of human participation

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in the Sanctus during the celebration of the Mass. At the same time, Bonaventure was less reliable regarding angelic interaction with the specific events taking place within the Mass. In *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure makes no mention of the celestial beings throughout his dialogue on baptism. In *On How to Prepare for the Celebration of the Mass*, he lists “association with the angels as one of the many benefits of the Eucharist.” Additionally, he encourages his fellow Franciscans to prepare their souls for the worship of God by striving to imitate the angels. He encouraged his parishioners to not eat before the administration or receiving of the Eucharist for such a “well-ordered soul . . . pertains to the Archangels.” Bonaventure was certain that angels, much like the role of the sacraments, play an intermediary role within the context of the divine economy. The sacraments exist as a “visible sign of invisible grace, the angels likewise exist as a sign of invisible grace; they are just sometimes-visible and sometimes-invisible.”

Bonaventure equates the hierarchy of the angels as serving as an example for the organization of the church, including both clergy and laity. When “the Church is hierarchized,” it provides necessary ecclesiastical stability. He argued that the clergy are to imitate and reflect the angelic life before their people and envisioned their work as focused on both spiritual and intellectual matters, an existence, he said, in which the laity would enter at death. Therefore, Bonaventure recognized, the task of the clergy is to

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address earthly matters, “intermingling the active and contemplative life while administering the sacraments, the laity, and the church itself.”

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), known affectionately as the “Angelic Doctor,” is concerned with firmly establishing the existence of angels. In sorting through his numerous works in which he addresses the topic of angels, James Collins, in his work *The Thomistic Philosophy of Angels*, synthesized three arguments upon which Aquinas rests his angelology.

First, like Bonaventure, Aquinas appeals to the perfection of the universe. Given that God created the universe in a state of perfection, “there is no such stratum of possibility that does not exist within that creation.” If this were the paradigm, the creation could not be actually perfect. Since their existence is not conditional upon union with a body, substances exist outside of the body called “separated substances.” One of the purposes of God in the work of creation was to show forth his own glory. Therefore, another way to demonstrate the perfection of the cosmos is that it reflects God’s inherent perfection. Aquinas argues that since God possesses intelligence that there must be creatures within his creation which are also intelligent. Therefore, “as immaterial substances, the angels contribute to the glory of God in an eminent way, and as intelligent and voluntary agents, they bear a likeness to [God] in their operations as well as in their substance.”

The subsequent argument in Aquinas’ existence of angels flows out his argumentation of the ordering of the creatures which populate the cosmos. As a whole the


universe may be considered perfect, but while each creature may reflect a degree of the perfection of God, they are not finally perfect.  

Therefore, according to Aquinas, there is a incessant ordering of the universe, from the most perfect beings to the least.  

To the extent that the creature mirrors God, they are understood to be “perfect.” Intelligence, which is a characteristic of perfection, “is superior to corporeality.” In human beings, both intelligence and corporeality unite together a higher order with a lower order. According to Aquinas, with this scheme of the order of the cosmos, humanity stands at the pinnacle of corporeal existence “and the nadir of intelligent existence.” Therefore, “Some intellectual substances superior in the order of nature to the human soul and not united with bodies therefore exist.”

Third, Aquinas argues within the framework of his two previous arguments founded on the “nature of intellection itself.” Humans, as beings of intelligence, possess possibly the weakest intelligence. Aquinas points out that human intelligence, in contrast to angelic, is reliant on the body, specifically the sensory organs, to perform acts of intelligence. Again, if the “scheme of perfection is to be filled completely,” an intellectual being must exist whose intellect is not wholly dependent upon a body or any sensory input. Such beings, Aquinas affirms, “can only be angels.”

Aquinas believed the angels to be spiritual and incorporeal beings. He appeals to Scripture to describe their spiritual reality by using physical language, such as the seraphim who have six wings in Isaiah 6 or Daniel who describes Gabriel’s clothing in Daniel 10. In Psalm 103 and Hebrews 1:14, the Bible identifies angels as spirits, leading

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117 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 64.
to the conclusion that angels exist as “beings of pure spirit.”\textsuperscript{119} In the same manner, relying on Pseudo-Dionysus, Aquinas understands God as described in Scripture with such attributes and appearances, such as those described above, merely as “likeness,” in relation to the angels.\textsuperscript{120}

In similar fashion, when an angel is understood as being in a place, there must be the acknowledgement that it is not the equivalent of designating a physical being as inhabiting a specific place. Aquinas’ assertion is that “an angel exists in a particular place by virtue of exercising a portion of its power,”\textsuperscript{121} and that as a result, angelic “movement” should not be comprehended as the actual act of traveling through corporeal space, but as “a series of contacts of power in specific places.”\textsuperscript{122} In addition, the terminology of time should not be used when referencing the angelic host, for they do not exist within the framework of time. Also, since they possess intellect without bodies, they “exist as operations of intelligence.” As an object, an intelligible is an abstraction existing outside of time, and the “intellectual act that grasps it must also exist outside of time.” Given that humanities intellectual acts “must grasp intelligibles that have been abstracted from phantasms, the intellectual act happens in time; in this case, however, time is merely accidental to the operation itself.”\textsuperscript{123} But, Aquinas states, phantasms are not needed by angels, and therefore “do not accrue the accident of existence within time.”\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{120} Aquinas, \textit{Treatise on Separate Substances}, 146-47.

\textsuperscript{121} Aquinas, \textit{Treatise on Separate Substances}, 148; Aquinas, \textit{Suma Theologiae} I.52.1, 9:44-47.

\textsuperscript{122} Aquinas, \textit{Treatise on Separate Substances}, 149; Aquinas, \textit{Suma Theologiae} I.53.1 & 2, 9:54-65.

\textsuperscript{123} Aquinas, \textit{Treatise on Separate Substances}, 149; Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.53.1 & 2, 9:64.

Aquinas relies heavily on Augustine in *Summa Theologiae* to define the period in which angels came into being. He cites Psalm 148:2-5 as evidence of the creation of angels by God, and then offers his own logical evidence. Far from being ignored in the Genesis creation account, Aquinas agreed with Augustine that the angels are defined and identified as “light” and “heaven.” It was assumed that Moses gave the angels corporeal identities to divert the people of Israel away from the idolatry of angelic worship, whom Aquinas illustrates as inclined to such things. Rather than confusing them with incorporeality, Moses meant, according to Aquinas, to offer them something that was easily understood.\(^{125}\) In his *Treatise on Separated Substances*, Aquinas relies on the scriptural account of Job.\(^{126}\) Whether angels came into being at the same exact time as corporeal beings does not prove to be a central issue within the writing of Aquinas. In fact, he states that whichever opinion could be accepted with little challenge. In *Separated Substances*, he appeals to Gregory Nazianzen (329–390), Jerome (347–420), and John of Damascus (676–749). Aquinas agrees with all three of these theologians that angels were created before all other corporeal creation. The question for Aquinas is whether the six days of creation is to be understood figuratively or literally. In a more figurative manner, Augustine believed the angels were created at the precise moment as everything else. However, if the act of creation took place through time, the assertion to the contrary is likewise probably. Aquinas believed that adherence to either position does not conflict with the truth.\(^{127}\) Regarding the number of the angelic kingdom, Aquinas appeals to Pseudo-Dionysus, and states that the number of the angels supersedes that of any of the


\(^{126}\) Aquinas, *Treatise on Separate Substances*, 139-40.

\(^{127}\) Aquinas, *Treatise on Separated Substances*, 141.
material beings, since the perfection of the universe demands that there be a greater number of “more-perfected beings.”\textsuperscript{128}

Aquinas concerned himself with the limitations of angelic power. He suggested that when angels execute miracles “they do not do so through their own power, but according to God’s.”\textsuperscript{129} Aquinas believed, like Pseudo-Dionysius, that the angels were organized into a hierarchy of orders and ranks. He stated, “Hierarchy is composed of a multitude of objects,” he said, and “such a multitude would be merely chaos were it not organized and divided according to the actions of the objects and their offices.”\textsuperscript{130} However, he points out that the idea of an order is oriented toward a particular set of goals shared by all of its objects.\textsuperscript{131} Regarding the angels, says Aquinas, their end “is to know God through the capabilities of their nature,” and “through grace, which enables them to see and know God in God’s essence.”\textsuperscript{132} Therefore, the angels are “organized according to the extent to which they enjoy both of these gifts, since they receive God’s grace in proportion to their own nature.”\textsuperscript{133} Likewise the angels are identified in accordance with the extent in which they possess these gifts. Aquinas states that while all angels “possess all possible spiritual gifts, higher angels will possess them to a greater degree than do the lower angels. Each order is thus named according to its $\textit{superus perfectio}$.\textsuperscript{134} Regarding the angelic rankings, Aquinas once again appeals to the scheme

\textsuperscript{128} Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 35; Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.50.3, 9:18.

\textsuperscript{129} Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology}, 193.

\textsuperscript{130} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.108.2, 14:126.

\textsuperscript{131} Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 82.

\textsuperscript{132} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.108.4, 14:132.

\textsuperscript{133} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.108.4, 14:132.

\textsuperscript{134} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.108.5, 14:136.
of Pseudo-Dionysius arguing that since the angels, as spiritual beings, are superior to all corporeal beings, they rule over them all.\textsuperscript{135}

The angelic relationship to humanity was not unimportant to Aquinas, though his seldom mention of such a relationship is rarely explored. He approached this relationship using a philosophical hermeneutic. He was most concerned with how the relationship between angels and humanity could occur. Agreeing with Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas affirmed that humanity was illuminated by the angels, and this illumination occurs in two modes: “First, the angels strengthen the human intellect to a level where it can receive the divine truth, and second, they offer intelligible, sensible images for the inferior human minds to grasp.”\textsuperscript{136} In other words, angels were capable of influencing the mind of humanity using the senses, the will, and the imagination. However, Aquinas affirms it is God alone who can directly modify the will of humanity. The angels do so indirectly by urging or coaxing the person to take certain actions or “by rousing that person’s passions in such a way that he or she makes the choice that the angels wish for him or her to make.”\textsuperscript{137} Through the influence of the imagination, Aquinas believes angels are able to manipulate the biological and spiritual factors of the human psyche that visions and dreams can be produced.\textsuperscript{138} Finally, human senses may be manipulated by either influencing the biological sensory itself or in the production of an object to be sensed, “such as when an angel appears in a physical body.”\textsuperscript{139}

In the same vein as his scholastic colleague Bonaventure, Aquinas recognized a relationship of cooperation between divine grace and human nature. The influence of

\textsuperscript{135} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.110.1, 15:4.

\textsuperscript{136} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.111.1, 15:20.

\textsuperscript{137} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.111.2, 15:22, 24.

\textsuperscript{138} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.111.3, 15:26, 28.

\textsuperscript{139} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I.111.4, 15:30.
angels, whether through illumination or advice, can always be ignored or even declined by its recipient. But, in disagreement with Bonaventure, Aquinas suggested that the time in which a person becomes linked with his or her guardian angel is not conception, but at the moment of birth. This flowed out of his belief in the primacy of reason and its central role in cooperation in angelic work. Since a human is not a relational being until birth, there would be no reason for that individual to cooperate with the angelic. He also dismissed the idea that a guardian angel takes charge of a person at the moment of their baptism. “Until a child is born,” he concludes, “the guardian angel that protects the mother also protects her child, as they are as yet an unseparated whole.” In addition, Aquinas did not believe that angels experience sorrow and grief when their charge does not enter heaven. For, he affirmed, the angels will is so inseparably intertwined with God’s will, and since nothing happens contrary to the will of God, the angels do not experience the sensation of grief and sorrow.

According to Aquinas, a human being can, at death, be transported into the angelic order. Clarifying his position, he draws a necessary distinction when he says that the angels are separated into orders in accordance with both their natures and gifts of grace. Obviously, given the dissimilarity of angelic and human nature, a humanity can never be considered equal to an angel “on the basis of nature itself.” Nevertheless, according to the gifts of grace, “quality is possible,” Aquinas states, “A human being can receive them to

140 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 83.
141 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 83.
142 Keck, Angels and Angelology. 160. Keck is referring to Aquinas’s Answer and his reply to the third argument. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I.113.5, 15:60, 62.
143 Keck, Angels and Angelology, 107-8. Keck is referring to Aquinas’s Answer; Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I.113.7, 15:66.
the extent that they become equal to the angels in that regard—even if such a gift goes beyond a human being’s natural capacity.”

Aquinas never wrote a treatise dealing specifically with the church. All of the secondary literature dealing with Aquinas’ conception of the church frames the discussion exclusively around the human members. Therefore, it proves a difficult task to decipher what he believed regarding the relationship between angels and the church. Nonetheless, there are traces of his address on this subject in the *Summa Theologiae*.

In III.8.4 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas investigates the question of Christ, who he recognizes as the “head of the angels.” He offers three distinct objections. (1) A head must be of the same nature as its members, yet Christ became human, not an angel. (2) Since the church is a *congregation fidelium* and the angels possess no faith, angels are not able to be members. Aquinas points to 2 Corinthians 5:6-7, which states that human beings “walk by faith, and not by sight.” The angels have proper sight, according to Aquinas, and therefore do not need faith. (3) Similar with his first objection, since the Word quickens souls, the Word made flesh (Christ) quickens bodies, which the angels do not possess. Consequently, Christ does not gift the angels with a

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144 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.108.8, 14.15.


146 Cf. Coleman O’Neill, “St. Thomas on Membership of the Church,” *The Thomist* 27 (April/July/October 1963): 88-140. When speaking of the “heavenly church,” O’Neill does so only in terms of the Church Militant and Triumphant, mentioning Principalities and Powers only in passing, on p. 92. Even more interesting is that when he expansively discusses the same Questions that modern theologians do—such as III.8 on p. 109 and following, and III.80 on p. 112 and following—he does not touch on the Articles that explicitly deal with the angels, completely leaving them out of the discussion.

147 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.8.4, 49:64.

148 Second Corinthians 5:6-7 says, “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

149 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.8.4, 49:64.
salvific life.\textsuperscript{150} The alternate position Aquinas presents places Paul’s words in Colossians 2:10 central in his argument, which names Christ as the head of “all Principality and Power.” He reasons that if such a classification is true, then the same can be true for the other angelic orders.\textsuperscript{151} But, it is in his own answer that the reader arrives at the heart of Aquinas’ reasoning. He asserts that one head must be over one body, that one body might be constructed of numerous individual parts, as long as those distinctive parts are arranged toward the same end. Humanity and the angels are to be employed in the same end—“the glory of the Divine fruition”—therefore, the “mystical body of the Church” contains both angels and humans within its membership.\textsuperscript{152} Citing Ephesians 1:20-22,\textsuperscript{153} Aquinas determines that both humans and angels enjoy the gifts of God and the influence of Christ as their supreme head.\textsuperscript{154} Aquinas is careful to underscore that the work and functions of the angels and humanity within the church are different and varied. Specifically, those functions are different regarding how they interact with the Eucharist. In Summa Theologiae III.80.2, Aquinas considers the query of whether humanity is the single entity that spiritually partakes in the Eucharist. Three objections are raised: (1) In Psalm 78:25,\textsuperscript{155} humanity eats angelic food, which is essentially the body of Christ. However, the angels would

\textsuperscript{150} Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III.8.4, 49:66.

\textsuperscript{151} Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III.8.4, 49:66.

\textsuperscript{152} As Sabra points out, the terms congregatio fidelium and corpus mysticum are Aquinas’s preferred terms for the church. Sabra, Thomas Aquinas’ Vision, 69.

\textsuperscript{153} Ephesians 1:20-22 says, That he [God] worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.

\textsuperscript{154} Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III.8.4, 49:66.

\textsuperscript{155} Psalm 78:25 says, “Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.”
only have the capacity to eat it were it spiritual food;\textsuperscript{156} (2) Augustine says the Eucharist assigns the members of the body of Christ, which integrates both angels and humans;\textsuperscript{157} (3) Additionally, Augustine also states that Christ must have eaten spiritual food, and as a result he lives in those who also do the same and they live in him. Aquinas argues that Christ resides in both humans and angels and therefore angels can and do spiritually partake in the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{158} Yet Augustine contends, as Aquinas engages his argument in this context, that an individual must approach the altar in order to partake of the Eucharist, and since angels do not approach the altar to receive, they do not receive the sacrament spiritually.\textsuperscript{159} 

For Aquinas, the answer is found in the proposition that “while Christ is contained in the sacrament, it is not his own proper species, but through sacramental species.” Therefore, Christ can be “eaten” in two different modes—“through his proper species and through his sacramental species.”\textsuperscript{160} It is in the former manner that angels ingest Christ, since they experience a unity with him in flawless precision of vision and charity, rather than in faith. It is in the latter manner in which humanity ingests Christ, since their union is with Christ by faith. “The angels,” Aquinas posits, “have no need to participate in the Eucharist in the same way that humanity does.”\textsuperscript{161} Reasonably, Aquinas states that the angels partake of the Eucharist in a more perfect manner since they do so through Christ’s proper species. On the other hand, humanity derives “our Eucharist from

\textsuperscript{156} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologicae} III.80.2, 59:34.

\textsuperscript{157} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologicae} III.80.2, 59:34, 36.

\textsuperscript{158} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologicae} III.80.2, 59:36.

\textsuperscript{159} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologicae} III.80.2, 59:36.

\textsuperscript{160} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologicae} III.80.2, 59:36.

\textsuperscript{161} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologicae} III.80.2, 59:36.
the heavenly one, receiving it through the sacramental species.” Notwithstanding the diverse manner in which they partake, both humans and angels share in the same exact Eucharist.

**Gabriel Biel**

Gabriel Biel (1420–1495), the German scholastic philosopher and member of the Canons Regular of the Congregation of Windesheim, begins with Aquinas in the development of his own angelology. In his work on both Biel and Aquinas, John Farthing emphasizes that Biel’s primary support in presenting the angels as pure spirits in their being is derived from reading Aquinas, and like Aquinas, Biel affirms that regardless of their incorporeality, angels are still able to choose to take on a physical human form. Biel’s explanation for this ability among the angels certainly recalls the arguments of the Angelic Doctor.

Biel also is indebted to Aquinas regarding his thoughts surrounding the cognition of the angelic host. Like Aquinas, he states that the angel’s comprehension is derived purely from the realm of their intellect and they have no need for any sensory apparatus or apprehension. However, Biel begins to stray from Aquinas’ teachings when he says that this same idea accurately holds even when an angel assumes a corporeal form, that “acts of understanding that seem dependent on that body are nevertheless still independent intellectual events.” Regardless of his alignment with Aquinas, Biel asserts that his judgments are in the “same vein.”

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Regarding whether each individual angel exists as its own species is the point where Biel most dramatically disagrees with Aquinas. When requested to select between Aquinas and Bonaventure by a “willful questioner,” Biel unenthusiastically resolves the position of Aquinas as unpersuasive. In addition, as to the time when angels were created, like Bonaventure, Biel suggests their creation coincided with the creation of the empyrean heaven, the abode in which they continue to reside. Like many others before him, Biel appeals to Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory in the formulation of his arguments for the angel’s station in creation. In Sentences, Biel fashions his argument regarding the angelic hierarchy by providing three differences of levels, concerning the “supercaelestis” or divine, the “caelestis” or angelic, and the “subcaelestis” or ecclesial and human. The two final levels, or the “created hierarchy,” are orders of “righteousness, knowledge, and activity, similar to each other in the way in which they depend upon God for their powers, as well as in the manner of their imitation of God.”

Biel, following the pattern suggested by Pseudo-Dionysius, divides the angels into three tiers in accordance with the properties and strengths they possess. The highest tiers possess knowledge. In other words, they converse with God, know God, and rest in God through observation within their own loyalty, understanding, and love. The middle tiers retain an “ordered power,” which is intended for the care of subordinates. Last, the lowermost tiers possess action, in which, Biel believes, they exercise the functions of administrators and ministers. He also names them as “contemplatives, actors, and ministers.”

165 Samuel, “Heavenly Theologians,” 91.

166 Farthing, Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel, 27.


168 Biel, Collectorium Circa Quattor Libros Sententiarum, 2:243.

leaders.” As to the angels’ residence within the larger hierarchy, Biel ultimately agrees with the scheme of Pseudo-Dionysius. Moreover, the different hierarchies and ranks of angels, as well as the distinctions within those tiers, determine the “nature of their mission to both humanity and to inferior angels.” As Biel writes, “The most powerful angels are sent to those of the middle ranks, the middle ranks to the lowest, and the lowest to the rest of physical creation.” Yet, he says, “these missions in no way keep the highest ranks from remaining in the presence of God and in contemplation.”

Biel believes that the relationship that exists between angelic and humanity inaugurates at the beginning of life. However, within the context of this relationship, he not only mentions the human relationship with the holy angels, but also the manner in which the fallen angels are involved in a person’s life. In dissimilarity to Aquinas and Bonaventure, Biel suggests that whether in the womb or whether an individual has “the use of one’s reason,” at no time in a person’s life are they outside of angelic care. The holy angels are tasked with the responsibility of the care of the spirit and the physical body by deterring the coercion of the demonic and their unceasing efforts to corrupt the soul. However, when a person succumbs to sin, the protection of that individual may be repelled. When this happens, the holy angels are commissioned to preserve him or her. Biel suggests that grace allows, through conversion and repentance, the sinner time to leave the damnation behind. Biel says, “If a person is made tolerable to God, the angels work to keep him or her from sliding back into sin. A hopeless obstinate person may again become mired in sin; but the fewer sins one commits, the more evident the work of

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170 Biel, *Collectorium Circa Quattor Libros Sententiarum*, 2:244.


 angels.”174 Despite this lack of holy fortification because of sin, according to Biel, the fallen angels are never able to kill a person because the holy angels will never allow this to take place, unless such a punishment is God’s judgment. If the fallen angels could kill individuals, they certainly would, and “no person in creation would be left alive.”175

Biel also believed the lines of demarcation between angelic and human can often become blurred. Such is the case, for example, after death. Biel writes that God the Father working through the mediation of Christ “will effect a triple restoration of the heavenly City, destroyed as it was during the fall: by redeeming humanity, reintegrating them among the angels, and filling the angels’ abode by arranging the new members therein.”176

Within the framework of his discussion on the sacrament of baptism, Biel discusses the relationship between angels and the church. Following Aquinas, Biel positions baptism as the preeminent sacrament, since without it, Biel believed, humanity is not eligible for salvation. Therefore, each member of the human race is qualified to serve as a minister of baptism. Any rational creature, demon or angel, is able to do the same, though such is very uncommon. Biel argues, following Aquinas, that there is a possibility that God might desire to bestow such power on any creature that he regulates to possess it, irrespective of the kind of creature “in the same way that God’s salvific power is not strictly limited to the sacraments themselves.”177 Regardless of his position, Biel believes that baptism is normally administered by human beings. In the same way that Christ was incarnate, the ministers of baptism should share in that same nature. Baptism

174 Biel, Collectorium Circa Quattor Libros Sententiarum, 2:287.
175 Biel, Collectorium Circa Quattor Libros Sententiarum, 2:287.
177 Farthing, Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel, 217-18.
is an act which inevitably disregards both demons and angels, since it occurs within the framework of the church residing on earth, which is known as the church militant.  

Concerning the celebration of the Eucharist, Biel creates a metaphor that expresses the union of angels and humans that occurs during the Mass. Similar to Aquinas, Biel draws the distinction that while both angels and humans contribute, they do so in different ways. “Christ,” Biel writes, “is the bread of the angels, which has become the hay for the flock of humanity. The blessed angels eat this bread, born of the Word, in heaven, while holy men and women eat the same hay on earth.” Even more noteworthy is the way in which human individuals partake in the signing of the Sanctus. During this juncture in the Mass, Biel states that humanity joins together with the angels in “praising, adoring, and trembling.” This event gives witness to “God’s majesty, showing reverence to the same, and tremble at the mastery of God and their own desire to serve, trembling not out of fear, but out of wonder.” Humanity adds to the angel’s eternally uninterrupted song, desiring to be members of that heavenly chorus. This is not because of any inherent worth within the song per se, but because of the self-effacing devotion and manner in which it is offered. Consequently, the Sanctus is both angelic and human. Clearly Biel recognizes that it is through humanity that angels are co-participants in the worship of God, or more precisely, that humans partake in the angel’s own worship of God.

**Conclusion**

The angelology of the medieval era reveals a varied set of concerns from the angelology of the patristic period. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Aristotelian

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179 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.80.2.


philosophy created a colossal shift in how theology, as an academic discipline, was practiced. Naturally, the conversation regarding the angelic landed squarely in the center of this conversation of philosophy and theology. The discussion of angels proved, however, to be the point at which the supernatural and natural worlds met together. Dialogue about the angels served as entry points to which the theologian or philosopher might be attracted. It is clear in the aforementioned examination of medieval angelology these beliefs were not merely focused on the who, but on the what. Each theologian no doubt struggled in their individual investigation of the subject of the angelic, since it is a discussion that must orbit around the existence of faith. Peter Lombard laid a rudimentary foundation, Bonaventure and Aquinas elucidated the complexities of the existence of angels, and Biel echoed the formulation of those conclusions. For each of these men, if these beings of pure spirit exist then perfection must have existed in the cosmos, and it was from this spiritual reality that the manner in which angels related to the entirety of creation could properly be explored. Regarding the angelology of the medieval age, the question of who was only able to be answered by first addressing the question of what—relationships of the angelic could only give rise when dictated by angelic nature.

CHAPTER 4
REFORMATION AND PURITAN ANGELOLOGY
AND JONATHAN EDWARDS

The angels come nearest to God of all creatures in the world, and they have kept their cloth of gold unstained six thousand years: O the purity, agility, beauty, glory, sanctity, and excellency of the angels!  
Isaac Ambrose

Scholars have discovered that it is a difficult task to categorize Jonathan Edwards theologically by forcing him into one theological camp or another. His theology is observably Reformed, but with various nuances. His first biographer, Sereno E. Dwight, says Edwards “called no man father,” giving credence to the fact that Edwards stood, in various areas, theologically independent. Amy Plantingua Pauw observes that Edwards could be “irreverent” toward the Reformer John Calvin and fully expected to discover new theological light as he went along, and more often than not “enjoyed tinkering with, if not transforming, his received Puritan and Reformed traditions.” On the other hand, Edwards personally viewed himself within the framework of the Reformed tradition and an advocate for its theological and pastoral implications. In the preface to his Freedom of the Will, he wrote, “I should not take it all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction’s sake,” even though “the term ‘Calvinist’ is in these days,

1 Isaac Ambrose, War with Devils: Ministration of, and Communion with Angels (Glasgow: Joseph Galbraith and Company, 1769), 229.


John Leith’s \textit{Introduction to Reformed Tradition} outlined the ethos of the Reformed tradition in terms of its distinctive emphasis. Most of these mirrored Edwards’ own thinking and emphases:

1. Stress on God’s sovereignty and thus the divine initiative—demonstrated by Edwards’ first published lecture, “God Glorified in the Work of Redemption.”

2. Concern for the glory of God above all most notably expressed in his \textit{The End for Which God Created the World}.

3. The belief that God works out his divine purposes in history—as Edwards charted in his \textit{History of the Work of Redemption} sermons.

4. Devotion to a life of holiness with the Law as a guide—illustrated in hundreds of Edwards’ sermons and detailed systematically in \textit{Religious Affections}.

5. Consideration of the life of the mind as service to God—exemplified by Edwards’ enormous intellectual output.
6. Preaching the Word of God with a plain style—demonstrated by more than 1000 sermon manuscripts written in a practical, earthy sermon style.

7. A disciplined life—illustrated by Edwards’ fastidious “Resolutions.”

Like Calvin, Edwards held to a robust Trinitarian theology. He also grappled with the doctrines of predestination and election striving to demonstrate their pastoral implications. He embraced covenant theology and its variety of covenants—those of works, grace, redemption, and the church. Some of his departures or disagreements with Calvin and the Reformers had to do with his views of the church and conversion and his views regarding eschatology. A more detailed departure from Calvin was his speculation on the heavenly realms of angels and demons. While Calvin warned of speculation, Edwards experienced freedom in filling his Miscellanies with musings, imaginations, and speculations regarding the heavenly realm. This chapter seeks to outline a brief theology of angels within the Reformed and Puritan traditions, setting the stage for Jonathan Edwards to draw from such tradition as he advanced the doctrine of angelology one step further by setting these celestial beings within the context of the history of redemption.

**The Reformation**

Modern scholarship has seen little profit in considering the angelology of the Reformation era. As the reader delves into the writings of the reformation period of the sixteenth-century, it becomes quite clear that most of the Reformers were clearly indifferent to such heavenly matters. Regarding the treatment of the subject of angelology, Rosemary Guilley writes,

> Luther and Calvin illustrate plainly the fact that Reformed theologians had little incentive to inquire into any perhaps benign, non-human mysteries of the invisible world . . . on the whole or Protestants, the angels’ post-biblical functions paled

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9 For more on these differences between Calvin and Edwards, see McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 667-70.
before the importance to God of humanity’s struggle against the Devil to achieve
divine identity as the elect of Christ.10

In addition, Guilley comments,

By and large, we find comparatively little inclination in the mainstream of classical
Reformation thought to deal with angels at all . . . when we do find them noticed we
rarely find them discussed at any length unless . . . with a caution against misuse of
the concept.11

Why does this viewpoint seem to prevail throughout Reformation scholarship? A possible
cause, as Euan Cameron emphasizes, is that a few, if any of the Reformers, “took the
time and trouble to construct a systematic angelology.”12

**Martin Luther**

In his works as a reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546) established angels as
having a fundamental role as archetypes of the Christian life. Because of their all-
embracing submission to the will of God, the good angels, according to Luther, had much
to teach Christians about the gospel faith and obedience.13 However, Luther was cautious
to warn his readers against expecting messages from angelic emissaries. Instead, he
believed that the message of the gospel through faith, as set out in Scripture, was sufficient
for any Christian to obtain knowledge about God. Moreover, Luther affirmed the complete
sufficiency of Scripture as the preeminent guide in the Christian life and did not reject the
reality of angelic spirits continuing intimacy within the affairs of humanity, and thus his

2004), 163.


12 Euan Cameron, “Angels, Demons, and Everything in Between: Spiritual Beings in Early
Modern Europe,” in *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period*,

works and sermons concerning these celestial creatures helped lay a rich foundation for the lore that emerged within the Lutheran traditions following his death.\footnote{Soergel, “Luther on the Angels,” in Marshall and Walsham, \textit{Angels in the Early Modern World}, 68.}

Luther’s affection for meditating on the central role of the heavenly angels can be examined in his earliest works, including his \textit{Lectures on the Psalms} (1513–1515), which was the first series of lectures delivered by Luther upon his appointment as a biblical lecturer at Wittenberg.\footnote{The lecturers and their exegetical methods are discussed in H. A. Oberman, \textit{Luther: Man between God and the Devil} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 250-54.} Together in content and tone, these lectures prove faithful to the medieval traditions of angelology. Although the subject of angels is not the central focus, the Psalms had long played a role in traditional angelology because their statements concerning the various angelic types could be used to distinguish the various ranks of these spirits and their roles. Philip M. Soergel comments,

More generally, the Psalms’ admitted character as a revelation of the prayer and praise patterns of the heavenly hosts had long been subjected to mystical, moral and allegorical explorations that were intended to deepen the scholastic theologians’ comprehension of the mysteries of heaven.\footnote{Soergel, “Luther on the Angels,” in Marshall and Walsham, \textit{Angels in the Early Modern World}, 68.}

While the nature of angels was not Luther’s central concern within his lectures on the Psalms, his dealing with the exegetical nature of the text revealed much about his angelology. For instance, Luther’s discussions of the phraseology of the Psalms are laden with allegory. Terms like “the shadow of thy wings,” the “harp” and “psaltery,” and the “chariot of God” are dissected to reveal the hidden attributes, not only of Christ, but according to Luther, the angels as well.\footnote{Martin Luther, \textit{Luther’s Works}, vols. 10-11, \textit{First Lectures on the Psalms} (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974).} While Luther came to consider in these early lectures issues about the angels’ purity and their proximity to God, he was beginning to prune away certain traditional elements of late medieval angelology. However, in later
years, around 1519 to 1520, as he began to assemble his evangelical theology, the subject of death prompted some of the reformer’s most decided praise of these heavenly spirits. In his *Sermon on Preparation for Death*, delivered and published in that year, Luther still remained close to the medieval tradition of the *ars moriendi* in his fashioning of a consolatory theology.\(^{18}\) The sermon stresses the significance of the precise moment of death, counseling the requirement of upholding one’s faith at this decisive instant. In a way that is similar to the traditional books on the art of dying, the entire focus of Luther’s statements are directed at keeping the Christian confirmed in faith through that fateful moment. In 1519, Luther had not yet disavowed many traditional religious beliefs like purgatory and the veneration of the saints. A close reading of the *Sermon* shows that he highlights the ministry of the angels, “of which there are innumerable many,” and their guardianship role in preserving the faith of the dying.

In the mid-1520s, Luther dedicated significant consideration to the Old Testament prophets in his biblical writings and lectures. Given the prominent role of the angelic within these texts, Luther came at this time to comment upon these spirits with increasing frequency. In his “Lectures on Zechariah,” a series delivered at Wittenberg in 1524 and 1525 and printed in separate Latin and German editions in 1526 and 1527, Luther asserted that Zechariah served as a proof text to demonstrate the manner in which “God rules the world by means of the angels, though of course, He does everything by Himself.”\(^{19}\) For Luther, God administers his creation through a “fourfold rule.” In other words, God exercises authority over his creation by means of his unmediated and direct power through the angelic host, through his preachers and apostles, and, finally, through secular governments. The role of the angels, the second level of the “fourfold rule,” is to

\(^{18}\) Martin Luther, *Ein Sermon von der Bereytung zum Sterben* (Wittenberg, Germany: Adam Petri, 1519). The sermon was popular and was reprinted twenty-two times between 1519 and 1525 in a number of cities. It was also included in several collected editions of Luther’s sermons.

\(^{19}\) Luther, “Lectures on Zachariah,” in *Luther’s Works*, 20:169.
“lead, guide, preserve, guard, and help” those creatures whom he has created. Unlike God, the angels do not inspire men “from within,” an indication to the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, but from without, that is, they implant “good, useful, or necessary, thoughts, and by removing evil, harmful thoughts from them.”20 In his final years, Luther continued to develop his theology of angels as preservers of Christians and of evangelical truth. Among the many projects to which he devoted himself was his immense collection of lectures on Genesis. These were delivered over a decade following 1535 and were completed only several months before his death. The angels figured more prominently in these commentaries than they had in any of the other pronouncements to this point in this theological career. In his lectures on Genesis, Luther spoke with confidence about the angels. He consistently attacked received scholastic notions of celestial hierarchies, insisting that the terms scripture used to describe these heavenly spirits—like cherubim, seraphim and archangel—did not derive from any delineation of various ranks of angels’ places within the heavenly hierarchy. Nor did they reveal these spirits’ powers over specific natural forces or realms within creation. Instead, these words merely referred to the contrasting anthropomorphic forms angels took when they appeared to human beings. As spirits, they assumed human likeness, sometimes adopting the visage of a young child, at other times seeming like old men.21 However, tensions remained in Luther’s thinking about the angels in his Genesis commentaries. Luther was very careful to discuss the frequent appearance of angels to humans. He preferred to speak about these spirits daily ministering to human beings in an unseen fashion. He confesses that their appearance was now rarer than in Old Testament times.

20 Luther, Luther’s Works, 20:170.

21 Luther, Luther’s Works, 3:61. See also Luther, Luther’s Works, 1:235-36.
John Calvin

Setting the stage for the Reformed tradition of angelology was John Calvin’s (1509–1564) *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which assumed a very guarded position on the subject of angels. Toward the end of Book I of the *Institutes*, Calvin dedicates chapters 14 and 15 to creation. Calvin’s discussion of the work of God in creation is divided into things invisible—the creation of (1) angels, and (2) demons; and things visible—the creation of (1) the world, and (2) human. To fully understand the act of creation, Calvin warns his readers that the subject should be approached with a willingness to “remain enclosed within [the] bounds to which God has willed to confine us, and as it were, to pen up our minds that they may not, through their very freedom to wander, go astray.” According to Calvin, idle questions, fables, and speculations about the beginning of the world must be rejected. Calvin agrees with Augustine that the highest cause is God’s will, and human beings often get lost unless the Scripture is employed in guiding them to seek God in all things.

In this section of the *Institutes*, Calvin explicates the creation of the world and the human creatures. He begins with the creation of angels. Calvin sets out to refute the notions that (1) the angels are nothing more than good impulses in human minds and (2) devils are only evil impulses. Calvin points out that Scripture is clear about the existence of both. In contrast to Thomas Aquinas, Calvin’s reflection on angels is extremely modest and brief.

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Calvin introduces his readers to angels: “I ought to insert something concerning angels.” The purpose of this insertion is not to create cosmological speculations about the purpose and nature of created beings below God and above human beings, but Calvin’s focus is God’s marvelous providence in creating a world so perfectly fitted for the use of humanity. Calvin situates the function and creation of angels and devils (I.14) between his discussion of the Trinity (I.13) and his explanation of human nature as created (I.15). Calvin begins his discussion by declaring his intention to avoid superstitious fables, which means he strives to base his argumentation on Scripture while rejecting human reason about the creation of the cosmos.

For Calvin, the real danger was in both unprofitable speculations about the angelic, but most importantly in the possibility of worshipping the angels. Instead, we must view God, Calvin wrote, as our “sole helper.” The angels were called “hosts . . . because as bodyguards surround their prince, they adorn his majesty and . . . like soldiers . . . [they] carry out his commands.” Under the headline “God makes use of the angels, not for his own sake, but for ours,” Calvin writes,

[God] makes use of angels to comfort our weakness, that we may lack nothing at all that can raise up our minds to good hope, or confirm them in security. One thing, indeed, ought to be quite enough for us: that the Lord declares himself to be our protector. But when we see ourselves beset by so many perils, so many harmful things, so many kinds of enemies—such is our softness and frailty—we would sometimes be filled with trepidation or yield to despair if the Lord did not make us realize the presence of his grace according to our capacity. For this reason, he not only promises to take care of us, but tells us he has innumerable guardians whom he has bidden to look after our safety; that so long as we are hedged about by their defense and keeping, whatever perils may threaten, we have been placed beyond all chance of evil.

26 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.3. Calvin writes, For if we desire to recognize God from his works, we ought by no means to overlook such an illustrious and noble example. Besides, this part of doctrine is very necessary to refute many errors. The pre-eminence of the angelic nature has so overwhelmed the minds of many that they think the angels wronged if, subjected to the authority of the one God, they are, as it were, forced into their own rank. For this reason, divinity was falsely attributed to them. (Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.3)

Calvin declares God as the creator of all things, both invisible and invisible, and among those invisible created things are the angels. In *The Theology of John Calvin*, Charles Partee suggests that “reflection on the ministry of angels allows the hope in God to be more firmly established.” A major danger to avoid, warns Calvin, is the Platonic notion of trying to gain access to God through angelic intermediaries. Calvin recognizes that the creation account as revealed in Genesis does not describe angels, but since they appear later in Scripture as servants of God, it is easily inferred that angels were part of the creative act of God. Eternality is attributed to God alone and therefore it is false to attribute divinity to the angels, for they have a time in which they were created, though the Scripture is silent on the exact moment. Calvin even warns that to consider the “existence” of the devil is a dangerous exercise if one attributes some type of divinity to the devil apart from the sovereignty of God.

According to Calvin, Scripture teaches that angels are special creations ordained to carry out God’s commands. Any investigation or conjecture beyond that affirmation leads to “empty speculations while idle men have taught apart from God’s Word concerning the nature, orders, and number of angels.” Angels are described by Calvin as

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29 Calvin explains, So, then, whatever is said concerning the ministry of angels, let us direct it to the end that, having banished all lack of trust our hope may be more firmly established. Indeed, these helps have been prepared for us by the Lord that we may not be frightened by the multitude of the enemy. . . . For as God does not make them ministers of his power and goodness to share his glory with them, so he does not promise us his help through their ministry in order that we should divide our trust between them and him. Farewell, then, to that Platonic philosophy of seeking access to God through angels, and of worshiping them with intent to render God more approachable to us. This is what superstitious and curious men have tried to drag into our religion from the beginning and per severe in trying even to this day. (Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.12)


31 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.4. Calvin states, Because the Lord willed to instruct us, not in fruitless questions, but in sound godliness, in the fear of his name, in true trust, and in the duties of holiness, let us be satisfied with this knowledge. For this reason, if we would be duly wise, we must leave those empty speculations which idle men have taught apart from God’s Word concerning the nature, orders, and number of angels. I know that many persons
celestial spirits having a real existence, though without bodily form, and Christ says there are “many legions” of them (Matt 26:53), but no one can determine the orders or degrees of honor among them. In this warning against type of conjecture, Calvin has in mind Pseudo-Dionysius who writes of *The Celestial Hierarchy* as “if he were eyewitness to it.” In contrast, Scripture reveals that angels serve “God in exercising God’s authority and thus exhibiting his divinity to us.” In addition, angels “keep vigil for our safety, take upon themselves our defense, direct our ways, and take care that some harm may not befall us.”

It is not a worthwhile exercise, Calvin suggests, to examine whether specific angels (guardian angels) have been allocated by God to individual believers because caring for humans is not the task of one but of all the angels. Those who insist that God assigns guardian angels over believers place a restriction on the providence of God. According to Calvin, God employs angels not out of necessity but out of grace, meaning that “God often dispenses with their service and works directly through his will alone.”

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32 Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 72. See also, Calvin, who suggests, Not only will deny that Dionysius, whoever he was, subtly and skillfully discussed many matters in his *Celestial Hierarchy*. But if anyone examine it more closely, he will find it for the most part nothing but talk. The theologian’s task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable. If you read that book, you would think a man fallen from heaven recounted, not what he had learned, but what he had seen with his own eyes. Yet Paul, who had been caught up beyond the third heaven [II Cor. 12:2], not only said nothing about it, but also testified that it is unlawful for any man to speak of the secret things that he has seen [II Cor. 12:4]. (Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.4)


Nevertheless, God has selected innumerable guardians to look after the safety of his creatures, making believers realize the presence of God’s grace. Speaking of the image of God, Calvin declares that in addition to humans, angels were also created in accordance to the image of God, and concludes the believers highest perfection is to become like them.37 Charles Partee notes that Calvin’s usual teaching is that conformity to the image of Christ is reserved for believers, not angels, because the “proper role of angels is not to set us an example but to lead us to Christ.”38

**Reformation England**

In the decades following the Reformation, English theologians readjusted their belief relating to angels in such a way that they could be utilized unequivocally as a conduit for Reformed ideas. The rediscovery and institution of justification by faith alone, aligned with the eradication of purgatory in theological thought, led to the firm denunciation of the idea that angels serve as intercessors between God and men. In *Institutes*, Calvin reminds his reader, “It is solely by the intercession of Christ that the ministry of angels extends to us,” and this was an attitude echoed in works by many English clergymen.39 The worship of angels is referred to as idolatry in the Geneva catechism, which in its 1550 English translation states, “If we shall haue recourse vnto Aungels or anye other creatures, puttynge any parte of oure confidence or truste in them: we commyte therin damable Idolatrye.”40 The scriptural support employed for these propositions was that God had vehemently warned against offering worship to angels in John’s Revelation when John fell to the

37 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.3. See also IV.1.4. Calvin explains more carefully that being like angels means putting aside the weaknesses of the present life.


ground in reverence to the angel that appeared to him.41 This Scripture passage was cited by the reformers as confirmation of their position on idolatry. In Elizabethan Homilies, it is remarked that “when the saint John fell before the angelles feet to worship him, the angel woulde not permit him to do it, but commanded him that he shoulde worship GOD.”42

Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham note in the introduction to their collection of essays on celestial beings that “angels had been badly compromised by their collaboration with many of the worst excesses of the late medieval devotional regime.”43 In the tradition of John Calvin, the other reformers were also concerned about what were considered “superstitious” elements commonly associated with belief surrounding the angelic. For them, various elements of late medieval angelology in themselves were “without the express word of God” and these scriptural accretions came under strict scrutiny. For example, a preoccupation in devotional practices with the named archangels, which was similar to the veneration and devotion to the saints, caused considerable uneasiness among the reformers. The separate masses to Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael, which appeared in the Use of Sarum, had no place in Reformed liturgy. Belief in angels was also undermined because much of the traditional belief was, unfortunately, either founded upon or received corroboration from the lives of the saints. In medieval sermons, angels often offer frequent ministry to believers, releasing them from prison and providing spiritual and physical nourishment to imprisoned and persecuted martyrs.44 Sermon collections such as The Golden Legend and Mirk’s Festial had been important in

41 Revelation 19:10 says, “Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

42 John Jewel, The Second Tone of Homilies of Such Matters as Were Promised, and Intitules in the Former Part of Homilies (London: Oxford University Press, 1848), 244.


establishing and disseminating angelic thought, and many common preconceptions about them derived from these collections.

The denunciation of the cult of the saints also eliminated the source material for angelic belief, wiping out the foundation for many expectations. Furthermore, the archangel Michael came under severe attack because his was the most mature of the angelic cults. The feast of St. Michael and All Angels survived the reformation purge of feast days from the ecclesiastical calendar, but nevertheless the shrine in honor of St. Michael’s Mount in Cornwall, England, suffered the same fate as many other religious implements in the mid sixteenth-century, being suppressed in 1538.45 There were also pockets of belief where reformers, although not necessarily opposed to a particular aspect of belief, were ready to reform it in keeping with the limited scriptural evidence. The first of such positions was the angelic hierarchy. Traditionally, although not officially sanctioned by the church, the nine angelic names revealed in Scripture were organized into three descending orders, with each angelic order being allocated specific functions.46 Although the reformers were not vehemently opposed to the orders of angels in a general sense, they were reluctant to define anything beyond that, and poured contempt on the embellishments of the late medieval tradition. Calvin urged his readers to avoid “frivolous questions” in favor of “solid piety,” stating, “Those who presume dogmatise on the ranks and numbers of angels, would do well to consider on what foundation they rest.”47

A similar area of controversy was the concept of guardian angels. The scriptural passages often appealed to for evidence of guardian angels were Jesus’s blessing of some children whose “angels do always behold the face of my Father in heaven,” the second the disciples mistaking the newly escaped Peter for “his angel” (Matt 18:10; Acts 12:15).


46 The names of the hierarchies are Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; Dominions, Virtues, Powers; and Principalities, Archangels and Angels.

47 Calvin, Institutes, I.14.4.
These passages were often interpreted as evidence that all humanity were divinely assigned specific guardian angels to watch over them during their lifetime, although, as with the angelic hierarchy, the evidence is by no means explicit. Reformers were somewhat divided over this particular question: Luther appeared to countenance the idea, whereas second generation reformers such as Calvin remained unconvinced, and there were concerns that this belief might prove a temptation to idolatry. Calvin states, “I dare not positively affirm: if each believer has a single angel assigned to them. Indeed, those who limit the care which God takes of each of us to a single angel, do great injury to themselves and to all the members of the Church.”

However, despite the careful pruning of angelology during the period of the English Reformation, angels survived and went on to assume a new prominence in the post-Reformation era. Their initial survival could be attributed to the rock-solid biblical credentials in which they were found. Theological belief about angels was founded in Hebrew and Greek Scripture, which provided countless examples of their existence and purpose. Angels were part of the Christian worldview: although by no means an unproblematic inheritance from late medieval period, for most reformers, the utility of belief in them far outweighed the more negative associations.

Accordingly, angels were utilized for varied purposes and intentions in the post-Reformation era. The preface to communion in the Book of Common Prayer called on the congregation to laud the name of God alongside “angels and archangels,” and many religious writings stress the importance of joining with the angels in prayer. It

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48 Calvin, Institutes, I.14.7. Calvin also repeated his warning that notions of good and evil angels “as a kind of genii” are amongst those aspects of faith that God had not deemed it necessary to elaborate upon, therefore “it is not worthwhile anxiously to investigate a point which does not greatly concern us” (Calvin, Institutes I.14.7). It should be noted, however, that ideas about guardians and hierarchies cannot be used as a litmus test of confessional identity—these areas remained ambiguous, and the relative importance placed on them fluctuated along with the religious and political climates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

49 Joseph Ketley, ed., The Book of Common Prayer 1549, in The Two Liturgies A. D. 1549 and A. D. 1552 with Other Documents Set Forth by Authority in the Reign of King Edward VI (Cambridge:
was also commonplace of Reformed thought that angels had been provided by a merciful God “in accommodation to the weakness of our capacity. Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) concurs that angels are “an exceeding great token of God’s fatherly care and regard towards us. [Through them] he frameth himself so sweetly to our capacities and dispositions.”50 In addition, the post-Reformation period also placed greater emphasis on the idea of angels as agents of God’s providence, the means through which God carries out his sovereign will on the earth. In a sermon translated in 1569, Danish theologian Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600) describes how God “never dealeth with man by his bare word,” but rather that he would “send angels to give men knowledge of his will.”51 Similarly, Anglican Clergyman James Calfhill (1530–1570) notes that angels “have been by God’s providence a defence of the faithful, and overthrow of the wicked.”52

The initial impact of reform did not entirely destroy older patterns of thought and practice concerning the angelic. Although the angelic roles of meditation and intercession were rejected, angels continued to be promoted by reforming clergymen. This leads the discussion to the heirs of the Reformation, the Puritans, who once again take up the subject in their writings and sermons.

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The Puritans

The Puritans rarely engaged in what twentieth-century theologians call “angelology” today.53 In desiring to cultivate a strictly God-centered worldview, the Puritans carefully and cautiously avoided the magical or mechanical.54 When the subject of the angelic are encountered within the writings of the Puritans, it is almost never isolated, but serves to emphasize the whole counsel of God as revealed in Scripture. The Puritans focused upon God, law, gospel, covenant, and not upon spirits.

Richard Godbeer distinguishes between the religious idea of the Puritans and popular magical beliefs by contrasting “supplicative” with “manipulative” spirituality. The magical worldview he categorizes as profoundly “manipulative,” as humanity uses certain rituals to manipulate spiritual powers. In contrast, the Puritan worldview, Godbeer suggests, was profoundly “supplicative,” as they acquiesced their physical selves and their desires to prayer and faith in the sovereign Lord. Yet, “on the popular level, these distinct approaches to spirituality often blend together.”55

The more the Puritans emphasized the subjects of God and Christ, the more the realm of spirits reduced. David Keck observes the medieval landscape as littered with angels:

From the great shrines dedicated to Michael the Archangel at Mont-Saint-Michel and Monte Gargano to the elaborate metaphysical speculations of the great thirteenth-century scholastics, angels permeated the physical, temporal, and intellectual landscape of the medieval West. Sculptures, stained glass, coins, clerical vestments, and pilgrim’s badges all bore images of the celestial spirits. Each September 29 on the Feast of Saint Michael, clerics all across Christendom delivered sermons on and offered prayers to Michael and his cohorts. . . . So pervasive were angelic matters that a manuscript for medieval miracle play provides stage directions for portraying


an angel “teleporting” a man from one place to another. In the Middle Ages, angels were ubiquitous.\textsuperscript{56}

However, as Joad Raymond writes, “Around 1500 most beliefs about angels, most representations of them . . . were not founded on Scripture.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus, the Reformation, with its insistence on \textit{sola Scriptura} and \textit{soli Deo gloria}, sought to peel away the multifaceted layers of popular tradition. Elizabeth Reis writes, “Though saints and angels were celebrated and revered in medieval Europe, in John Calvin’s revolutionary religious teaching their significance was deemphasized in favor of God’s centrality and supremacy.”\textsuperscript{58} The result, she emphasizes, is that “reports of angel sightings were infrequently described in the written records of both [Puritan] clergy and lay people in the seventeenth century.”\textsuperscript{59}

English poet and civil servant, John Milton (1608-1674), explored the expansive world of angels in his epic poem \textit{Paradise Lost}. The story of \textit{Paradise Lost} is told by and of angels and relies upon their conflicts, communications, and miscommunications. Joad Raymond argues that in terms of its imaginative drive and aesthetic architecture, \textit{Paradise Lost} is a poem about angels, and Milton’s understanding of creation in general and angels in particular.\textsuperscript{60} Milton’s angels are presented as peculiarly intense creatures. They engage in more intimate relations with humanity than in any other early modern text.\textsuperscript{61} The first copy of \textit{Paradise Lost}, published in London in 1667, arrived in the new world in 1698, after New York City ordered a copy for its library. Yale listed \textit{Paradise Lost}.

\textsuperscript{56} David Keck, \textit{Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

\textsuperscript{57} Raymond, \textit{Milton’s Angels}, 4.


\textsuperscript{59} Reis, “Otherworldly Visions,” 282.

\textsuperscript{60} Raymond, \textit{Milton’s Angels}, 9.

\textsuperscript{61} Raymond, \textit{Milton’s Angels}, 10.
Lost as part of its collection in 1714, two years before a young Jonathan Edwards arrived in New Haven to study theology. In 1715, Harvard College boasted that their collection included Paradise Lost as well as all of Milton’s other works. Edwards lists Paradise Lost twice in his meticulously kept log of all books and essays he read. Milton phrases and excerpts from Paradise Lost appear in diaries and sermons throughout New England. To what extent Milton’s thoughts concerning angels played a role in Edwards’ understanding is unsure. Regardless, Paradise Lost was significantly influential within the Puritan mind and helped shape the intellectual landscape and theological reflection on the angelic.

The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 16) says, “God created all the angels spirits, immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power, to execute his commandments, and to praise his name, yet subject to change.” The Puritans who composed the catechism had a high view of the angelic, yet were always very careful to subordinate them to God.

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Isaac Ambrose

English Puritan Divine Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) wrote *Communion with Angels*, first published with his *Works* in 1674. While strongly experimental in its nature, this proved to be Ambrose’s most theoretical work. This body of work examines the manner through which the divine messengers of God aid the believer through various eras of life, beginning at birth and extended to judgment. Ambrose stressed that angels defend and keep believers safe from the devil’s numerous and varied temptations and ultimately serve as the agents of God’s divine providence among the realm of humanity. In addition, angels may influence the dreams of believers, and therefore the believer is encouraged to be watchful and discerning concerning the origin of their dreams as to whether they were initiated from God or not.

In meditating on Hebrews 1:14, a question is presented that necessitates an answer: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Ambrose acknowledged that, in its context, this verse establishes the absolute superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the angels. He said, “You see I had need to be careful what I say of angels,” lest the glory of God and Christ be wrongly ascribed to them (Col 2:18; Rev 19:10; 22:9). From Hebrews 1:14, Ambrose deduced five doctrines about angels: (1) they are spirits, (2) their office is to minister and serve, (3) the highest angels shares in this office, (4) angels are commissioned for this work by God and Christ, and (5) the office of angels is to minister to the heirs of heaven, not all people. Ambrose says, “They are called principalities, powers, mights, and dominions . . . most frequently they are called angels, which is not a name of their nature, but of their office; the word signifies a messenger, as if they were ever running errands betwixt heaven

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64 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 216. Ambrose writes, “You see I had need to be careful what I say of the angels, lest that honour which should be given to God and Christ, may in any sort redound to them. This hath been the error of former ages, and all errors there is almost none more ancient than this” Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 216.

65 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 217.
and earth.”66 Regarding the order or hierarchy of the angels, Ambrose writes, “That there is order amongst the angels, I do not doubt; God is the God of order, and as he orders all things below.”67 He continues by defining that order as having less to do with their nature and more with their office.68 The angels are sent on commission from God and Christ to “execute their office of ministration.”69

The purpose, service, and ministration of the angels, according to Ambrose, is strictly reserved for those who are heirs of heaven. He observes,

1) That the elect are so precious with God, that for their sakes he gives out commands. 2) That he commands the angels (his choice and chief servants) for the good of his chosen. It is the usual way of his providence, to command the strong in behalf of the weak, and to commend the weak to those what are more strong . . . 3) That the end or meaning of the command is for the elect’s custody, “to keep thee:” They must not exercise a power or dominion over them, as the evil spirits do from all their followers: But the command is to preserve them, defend them, deliver them, keep them, and protect them. 4) That the keeping of saints is limited to their ways; “They shall keep thee in all ways;” i.e. in all thy necessary lawful ways, not in thy sinful devious wanderings. 5) That the obedience of the angels to this command is precise, exact, and diligent; i.e. they shall accompany thee, go before thee, wait upon thee, follow thee, as the shadow follows the body, compass thee round, lead thee, observe thee, and in all straits or necessities lend thee an hand. 6) That the issue of this obedience is safety and security. By this one danger we understand; not any hurt, be it never so little, shall befall the elect; so far shall they be from harm in the head, that it shall not reach the foot; indeed neither foot nor head, nor an a hair of their head shall perish.70

Ambrose likens the relationship of the angels to humanity as to how nurses and mothers deal with their children:

66 Ambrose, War with Devils, 219.

67 Ambrose, War with Devils, 221.

68 Ambrose writes, I am apt to think and do believe, that the difference of those glorious spirits in heaven, is not their nature, but in their offices; for as among men there is a parity and equality in respect of nature, and the excellency of the one above the others is but by accident, so it is with the angels, they are equally spiritual substances, all equally created good, and pure, and perfect, and their imparity is because of the divers kinds of their offices, wherein they are employed: Hence some are called angels, some archangels, some principalities, some dominions, etc. (Ambrose, War with Devils, 221)

69 Ambrose, War with Devils, 222.

70 Ambrose, War with Devils, 225-26.
So must the angels deal with the children of God, that is, they must keep them in their ways, they must bear them up in their hands; children often stumble and fall, unless they be led and carried in hands and arms; and therefore God hath given his angels a charge over his children.

This ministry of the angels to the saints is not drudgery, but delight. Ambrose said that in some respects “they [angels] come nearest to God of all creatures in the world, and they have kept their cloth of gold unstained six thousand years: O the purity, agility, beauty, glory, sanctity, and excellency of the angels!”

A clerk to the Westminster Assembly and a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell (1599–1668), Thomas Manton (1620–1677), described angels as beings who are ravished by the glory of God and therefore earnestly and affectionately desire to see yet more of the divine beauty shining in the work of Christ, the redeemer of sinful men (1 Pet 1:12).

Further, Manton believed angels have direct relations with humanity. He writes, “Angels have more to do in human affairs than we are aware of. There are evil angels assisting in the counsels against the church, and good angels resisting, in those days of conflict. The combat is not only between men and men, but between angels and angels.”

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71 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 226.

72 Ambrose explains,

It is their delight to attend the saints, they know that one day they shall live together, and sing together, and rejoice together; they know that the saints shall supply the room of the fallen angels, and when they meet, O the joy that will be betwixt them! In the mean time, it is their desire and delight to attend their partners in heaven’s joy, for they are acquainted with God’s design, and purpose to save them, they know what Christ hath done and suffered for them; the mystery of godliness is seen of angels, it is so seen, that they take great delight to behold it, yea, are ravished in the very beholding of it, as some new and strange object . . . they are so ravished at the work of our redemption, how should they but with delight attend the redeemed ones of Jesus Christ. (Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 229)

73 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 229.


Samuel Willard

The American Puritan and pastor of Third Church in Boston, Massachusetts, Samuel Willard (1640–1707) wrote a large exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Although the Shorter Catechism says very little about angels, Willard addressed the subject in his expositions of God’s nature as “spirit” (Q. 4) and the work of creation (Q. 9). Willard writes, “Angels . . . are great company of spiritual natures, or substances, created on purpose to be ministering spirits unto God.” Scripture is clear that angels were created by God (Ps 148:2, 5; Col 1:16). Willard proposed that the number of the angels are such that it is impossible to count them (Luke 2:13; Matt 26:53; Heb 12:22). He also believed angels have a specific nature (Heb 2:16) as spiritual substances. Both God and angels are called “spirits” in an analogous but different manner. Willard makes the following observations about how angels reflect God. They are like God:

1. “Spirits are invisible substances, i.e. they cannot be seen by our bodily Eyes.” Angels have, in the past, assumed bodies to appear to humanity. “Some have been so foolish as to think there are no angels, because we see them not: and on the same groundless arguing, have some concluded that there is no God; but this belongs to his nature, that he cannot be seen by a created eye.

2. “Spirits are impalpable. . . . They cannot be felt (Luke 24:39). . . . In sum, all the senses are incapable of apprehending Spirits. Angels may be with us, and we have no manner of sense of it: nor do men apprehend sensibly the Presence of God, though in him we live, move, and have our being.”

3. “Spirits are the most agile, active, or nimble beings among creatures.” Angels are “God’s swift messengers to do his will.” They travel faster than lightning. They are never tired. They are like the wind (Ps 18:10). “The swiftest things among elementary and corporeal substances are slow and dull compared with them.”

4. “Spirits are the strongest among created beings.” They excel in strength (Ps 103:20) and are called powers (Eph 6:12). One angel can fight off any army of men. Consider what angels did at the empty tomb (Matt 28:2–7).

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5. “Spirits are the most incorruptible of created beings.” This refers to their power, not their purity. Lesser creatures cannot harm angels or annihilate them. “They are not so passive: they cannot receive impression from inferior beings.”

6. “Spirits are rational substances, endowed with the noblest faculties of understanding and will.” They understand by reason and revelation (Eph 3:10). Their wills love God and His people (Ps 103:20; Luke 15:10).78

Willard specially warned his parishioners: “We are to rest in the revealed will of God for our Hope, and not to pry into his secret will,” and mandated, “leave Secret Things to the day of Revelation.”79 The attributes of angels are mere echoes of God, who is infinitely more glorious than angels (Ps 148:13). According to Willard, angels fall short of God in a number of ways:

1. Spirits are creatures, but God is not. He is and was and is to be. “Let us say as much as we can of the Angelical Perfections, we must still remember that they are but created Perfections, which they enjoy: and created Spirits had a beginning, but God is without beginning: they are the Children of time, but he is the Father of Eternity: they are indeed the sons of the morning, and the morning stars; time and they began in the same instant, but He was before all time, is from Everlasting: they had their being from another; it was given them: but he had His from no other. His Being is His own.

2. God is “a pure act” but angels have “potentiality” to be, or not to be, and so to change. “It is a dispute among Pneumatists, whether Angels have any material Principles, or are pure Forms; it will not profit the Audience generally to debate it here, it is enough, their being Creatures assures us of their Passivity, or Potentiality in them; they did once pass from not being into being, and they are capable of returning to nonentity again: yea, are capable of the impressions of happiness and misery; are mutable Creatures; some of them did fall; all which things result from their passivity. None of which are compatible with God.”

3. Angels are limited by their own essence to one place at a time. “That they are limited beings is beyond dispute, for to be a Creature, and to be finite is is reciprocal: how they are so limited, is a debate, which the curiosity of wits may exercise their reason in, but can form no Article of faith about: whether by any spiritual matter, or otherways, it is sure they are Essence, and their own Essence limits their being within the confines of finiteness; so that one Angel fills not all places at once, nor is in Heaven and Earth at the same instant: but the Divine Essence is unlimited, and Infinite.”

4. Angels are under the dominion of their Creator. “They owe subjection to him who made them; the very name of Angel which they bear upon them carries this intimation in it; for this reason they are called “ministering spirits,” Heb 1:14. But

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God is above all Dominion, it belongs to him as his Prerogative; he is suprem, and Angels themselves are at his command in all things.”

5. As Spirits, the essence and acts of angels are different. They do not share in God’s simplicity whereby we can say that God loves and God is love. “They are distinct the one from the other: but in God his Essence and his Act are one and the same thing: hence we say, Whatsoever is in God is God; but we cannot so say of a created Spirit or Angel: hence they are capable of several distinct principles and powers in them, and not only in our Conception, which cannot be affirmed of God.”

Willard writes, “The nature of God and the nature of angels are infinitely different one from the other.” He believed God and angels are essentially expressed by one and the same general name, viz. spirits, only to help humanity in their understanding of the heavenly. He explains,

We must remember that he [God] is a thousand times more glorious than all Spirits, or second Beings tho’ never so excellent, that can be named: but because Rational Beings are more noble than Irrational, and because Spiritual Beings have a peculiar excellency above Corporeal, and the highest created perfections are to be found in the Heavenly Angels, and we are to give the best of our thoughts and conceptions to God, we are pointed, by such comparison, to see something of his praise worthy excellence, but still remembering that he is above all glory & praise.

Like most of the Puritans, Willard was vehemently opposed to representing the divine nature and angels through pictures or images. For it is impossible, he exclaims, to represent the shape and form of that which is invisible. Like Calvin, and others within the Reformed tradition, Willard warned that such images would inevitably lead to idolatry. He writes, “For any to entertain or fancy any other Image of God, but those reverend impressions of his glorious Perfections that are engraven upon his heart, is highly to dishonor him, and provoke him to Jealousy.”

**Thomas Ridgley**

Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734) was an English Puritan pastor who became famous and widely known for his refutation of Arminianism. His *Body of Divinity* became

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a theological standard for moderate Calvinism. In addition to other works, he wrote a massive work on the Westminster Larger Catechism. In answering the question, “how did God create the angels?” Ridgley states,

There are two species of intelligent creatures, to wit, angels and men. The former of these are more excellent; and we are in this answer, led to speak concerning their nature, and the glorious works with they are engaged in. But let it be premised, that this is a doctrine that we could have known little or nothing of, by the light of nature. We might, indeed, from thence, have learned, that God has created some spiritual substances, such as the souls of men; and we might argue, from his power, that he could create other spirits, of different natures and powers, and that some of them might be without bodies, as the angels are; yet we could not have certainly determined that there is such a distinct order of creatures, without divine revelation, since they do not appear to, or visibly converse with us; and whatever impressions may, at any time, be made on our spirits, by good or bad angels, in a way of suggestion, yet this could not have been so evidently distinguished from the working of our own fancy or imagination, were we not assisted in our conceptions about this matter, by what we find in scripture, relating thereunto.84

Ridgley continues by defining the angels by using five scriptural descriptions:
(1) “the morning stars” (Job 38:7) for their glory above all other creatures, (2) “the sons of God” for being created by God in his image, (3) “spirits” for being immaterial (Ps 104:4), (4) “a flame of fire” for their agility and fervency in obeying God (Heb 1:7), and (5) “thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers” (Col 1:16) for their high dignity and noble work.85

Ridgley believed that the nature of angels was incorporeal and consequently they should be called spirits. Therefore, as spirits, the angels possess the “power of thinking, understanding, willing, refusing, and are subjects of moral government, being under a law, and capable of both moral good or evil, happiness or misery.”86 Regarding their nature and abilities, Ridgley comments that the angels have the power to move,

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85 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:26-27.

86 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:27.
influence, or act upon material beings. He compares the angels to the nature of the soul of man defining the soul as united to bodies “whereas angels are designed to exist and act without bodies,” but nevertheless because of the assignments they are given in the scriptural record, they are able to act upon material beings.\textsuperscript{87} Ridgley also affirms that the angels are immortal, or incorruptible. While the angels, because they do not possess bodies, might be annihilated by the same one who brought them into existence, they are not, according to Ridgley, able to die. He writes, “Since God has determined that they [angels] are to exist for ever, we must conclude that they are immortal, not only from the constitution of their nature, but by the will of God.”\textsuperscript{88}

Ridgley offered these comparisons between God and angels that prove helpful in separating the creator from the created. God created angels holy (cf. Matt 25:31; Mark 8:38; Rev 14:10), but their holiness is infinitely less than that of God, of whom Scripture says, “Thou only art holy” (Rev 15:4). They excel in knowledge (2 Sam 14:20), but only God knows men’s hearts (Jer 17:10) and the future (Isa 41:23). Angels are mighty in power (Ps 103:20; 2 Thess 1:7), but only God can create the world (Isa 40:28) and sustain its existence and motions (Heb 1:3). Only God can regenerate the soul as a new creation (Eph 2:10). God created angels in a high estate of glory, but they were not immutable.

\textsuperscript{87} Ridgley writes, This we understand concerning the nature and power of angels, as spirits, by comparing them with the nature of the soul; though there is this difference between them, that the souls of men are made to be united to bodies, and to act by and upon them, whereas angels are designed to exist and act without bodies; nevertheless, by the works, which are often, in scripture ascribed to them, it appears that they have a power to act upon material beings. As for the conjecture of some of the fathers, that these spirits are united to some bodies, though more fine and subtil than our’s are, and accordingly invisible to us, we cannot but think it a groundless conceit; and therefore to assert it, is only to pretend to be wise above what is written, and to give too great a loose to our own fancies, without any solid argument. (Ridgley, \textit{A Body of Divinity}, 1:27-28)

\textsuperscript{88} Ridgley, \textit{A Body of Divinity}, 1:28.
Many angels fell from being God’s sons to become God’s enemies (Jude 6). The fallen angels, Ridgley comments,

Moreover it appears, that there are holy angels, because there are fallen angels, who are called in scripture, devils; this is so evident, that it needs no proof; the many sins committed by their instigation, and the distress and misery which mankind is subject to, by their means . . . And, because of their malicious opposition to the interest of Christ therein . . . Now it appears, from the apostle Jude’s account of them, that they once were holy; and they could not be otherwise, because they are creatures, and nothing impure can proceed out of the hand of God, and, while they were holy, they had their residence in heaven. This they lost . . . being thrust out of it, as a punishment due to their rebellion.

Regarding the work of angels, Ridgley believes their purpose for which they were created was to execute the commands of God and worship him. Ridgley emphasizes the worship of the angels at the incarnation of Christ in Luke 2:14, their worship when one sinner repents in Luke 15:7, 10, and their joining with the saints in heaven to worship God in Revelation 5:11–12. Ridgley is careful in listing a hierarchy among the angels, choosing instead to be silent where he believes the Scripture is also silent. He states, “This is a distinction which the scripture says nothing of; for they all behold the face of God in heaven, and are in his immediate presence; and they are all likewise called ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them which shall be heirs of salvation.” Ridgley believes the angels communicate their ideas to each other, though they do not possess organs of


90 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:27.

91 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:30-31.

92 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:31. Ridgley explains, This is a branch of that social worship, which they are engaged in; since we cannot suppose that it is performed without harmony, otherwise it wants a very considerable circumstance, necessary to render it beautiful, and becoming a state of perfection, we must conclude, that there is a greatest order among these heavenly ministers; but whether they are to be considered, as having a government, or hierarchy, among themselves, so that one is superior in office and dignity to others; or whether they have a kind of dominion over one another; or whether some are made partakers of privileges, that others are deprived of; this we pretend not to determine, since scripture is silent on the matter. (Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:31-32)
speech in the same manner as man. In some other way, he emphasizes, they “impart their minds to one another.”

Increase Mather and Cotton Mather

New England Puritan Divine, Cotton Mather (1663–1728), was born in Boston, on March 19, 1663. Cotton was the eldest son of Increase (1639–1723) and Maria (1642–1714) Mather and grandson of Richard Mather, who served as the first minister of Dorchester, Massachusetts, and John Cotton (1585–1652), perhaps the most intellectual of this first-generation of American theologians. Increase, Cotton’s father, served as the minister of the Second Church in Boston and nonresident president of Harvard College from 1685 to 1701. Both of Cotton’s parents fully expected that he would follow in the footsteps of his father. Consequently, at the age of twelve, he was admitted to Harvard College and began a rigorous course of study. His intellectual abilities demonstrated a great propensity toward philosophy and science. Cotton was presented with his first degree at the age of sixteen, awarded by his father. He proceeded in his study of medicine and as a young man listened at meetings organized by Increase for scientific discussion and experimentation. He received a master’s degree at the age of nineteen and, in 1690, was welcomed as a fellow of Harvard College. Cotton’s life was filled with various church controversies. Perhaps he is best known for his involvement and publications in the witchcraft trials at Salem.

In some of these instances [Scriptural evidence he provides], if the voices uttered by them were real, this may be accounted for, by supposing that they assumed bodies for the same purpose, and so communicated their minds to each other, in a way not much unlike to what is done by man. But this is not their ordinary way of conversing with each other: notwithstanding, we may, from hence, infer, and from other scriptures, that might be brought to the same purpose, that there is some way or other by which they communicate their thoughts to one another. How this is done, is hard to determine; whether it be barely by an act of willing, that others should know what they desire to impart to them or by what other methods it is performed; it is the safest way for us, and it would be no disparagement were we the wisest men on earth to acknowledge ignorance of it. (Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity*, 1:33)
Cotton reported to have personally experienced a celestial visitation:

A strange and memorable thing. After outpourings of prayer, with the utmost fervor
and fasting, there appeared an Angel, whose face shone like the noonday sun. His
features were those of a man, and beardless; his head encircled by a splendid tiara;
on his shoulders were wings; his garments were white and shining; his robe reached
to his ankles; and about his loins was a belt not unlike the girdles of the peoples of
the East.\textsuperscript{94}

Around the year 1685, Cotton recorded in his diary the account of a private angelic vision
he had experienced. Mather’s angelic vision of a winged, beardless angel wearing a
“splendid tiara” is startling and virtually unprecedented in seventeenth-century New
England.\textsuperscript{95} The New England Puritans could readily accept the devil coming to earth, but
God’s direct interventions and angelic visitations were another matter entirely.

Cotton Mather would have been fully aware of his colleagues’ skepticism
about heavenly spirits visiting humanity. Cotton’s own father expressed ambivalence
about the visibility of angels to humans. In a 1684 treatise, Increase Mather admitted that,
according to Scripture, angels appeared frequently to people in “old time,” however,
“their visible appearance is less frequent than formerly, it was without question.” In
addition, Increase insisted, “They may still appear visibly, when the work which they are
sent about cannot otherwise be performed.”\textsuperscript{96} In a later sermon, Increase altered his view.
In agreement with his Reformed forbearers, he warned against the idolatry of angel
worship emphatically declaring that “the Angelical Nature is invisible to bodily eyes.”\textsuperscript{97}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[94] W. C. Ford, ed., \textit{The Diary of Cotton Mather} (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society,
1912), 86-87.
  \item[95] On the dating of the angel sighting, see D. Levin, “When Did Cotton Mather See the
Angel?” \textit{Early American Literature} 15 (1980–1981), 271-75; and K. Silverman, review of Mather’s
  \item[96] Increase Mather, \textit{An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences} (Boston: n.p., 1684),
204.
  \item[97] Increase Mather, \textit{Meditations on the Glory of the Heavenly World} (Boston: n.p., 1711), 130.
\end{itemize}
Increase included several cases of supposed and mistaken angelic sightings in his *Illustrious Providences*, always concluding with a solemn warning that Satan, the fallen dragon, can appear as a good angel to deceive the unsuspecting. For this reason, he warned his congregants that it was dangerous to desire an angel to come to earth and appear to them: “For thereby some have been imposed upon by wicked Daemons, who know how to transform themselves into Angels of Light.”98

Often despite their skepticism of supernatural events, Puritan ministers attributed the intervention of God with miraculous healing, hesitantly connecting the miraculous event to the influence and presence of angel. Increase emphasized the manner in which certain biblical personalities, such as the Old Testament prophet, were healed and suggested that others might also benefit from an angelic touch. The colonies’ first complete medical guide, *The Angel of Bethesda*, was written by Cotton and recounted individuals who had experienced medical remedies within the context of dreams as they slept. He also wrote of people who were so miserably sick that medicine proved to be useless but who received unexplainable recoveries because of “the Wonderful Work which He had wrought upon” them.99 Cotton cautiously proposed that it was the direct involvement of angels, though he feared arousing “unwarrantable superstitions, or affections,” admitting, “It is possible there may be more of the Angelical Ministry, than we are Ordinarily aware of.”100 Angels functioned secretly, “behind the curtain,” Mather proposed, by “impressions

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100 Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, 53.
on the mind” to physicians, and provided them with the necessary information about remedies available only through this “insensible manuduction.” He even implied that his *The Angel of Bethesda* may be a product of angelic illumination and involvement for the good of humanity.

The powers of angels were as comprehensive as they were indefinable. Increase refuted any explicit activity among the angels, but nevertheless proposed that they might prove useful to believers. He contended, “There are Thousands of Thousands, yea, Myriads of Myriads of them . . . this we are sure of.” The actions of angels among believers were “serviceable,” in order that believers would serve God better. According to Cotton, they brandished extraordinary power, enough “to manage and apply all the Elements, to make Thunders and Lightening’s, and Earthquakes!” Cotton also believed angels answered the faithful prayers of believers, and, like God, watch over people. Yet they also watched without intercession. In addition, angels protected believers from various enemies and evil and reassured people during periods of “wants, of straits, of difficulties.” Increase warned, “Remember, that the Angels are the Spectators of your Behavior. Behave you selves, as having the Eyes of the Angels on you. Often think, Is not an Angel standing by?”

How was a person to know or be aware if the angelic intervention was derived from the holy angels or demonic? In the colonies, both ministers and laity grappled with this question. The Puritans often pointed to Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 11:14 where Satan frequently disguised himself as an angel of light. The Puritans believed that Satan

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103 Mather, *Coelestinus*, 21.

might choose to attempt such a transformation to disarm his victims or even draw the souls of believers away from Christ. Believers, they warned, must be on guard for such treacherous trickeries. Increase was specifically concerned with this when he posited, “How easy then is it for Daemons, who have perfect Understanding in Opticks, and in the Power of Nature to deceive the Eyes, and delude the Imaginations of Silly Mortals?”\(^{105}\) Notwithstanding angelic invisibility, Increase trusted that “Good Angels do not hide themselves in the dark under ambiguities, but declare their message clearly.”\(^{106}\) However, for Increase and Cotton, the trustworthiness of angels depended on what the their message was and to whom it was delivered.

Two examples perfectly illustrate the Puritan’s caution when considering divine communicators either visibly or audibly declaring their message to humanity. In 1694, in Boston’s North Church, an unnamed female congregant described hearing a voice that she automatically assumed was that of an angelic visitor, but Cotton, upon hearing of the incident, assured her it was not the voice of an angel. Cotton thought perhaps the lady might be a cruel victim of a “loose imagination.” However, Cotton later affirmed that the “invisible whisperer” was a heavenly creature when he heard that the relayed message was something the congregant would have had no other way of personally knowing. Later, Cotton altered his view again and stated that he doubted the genuineness of this angelic event because of two reasons. First, after the lady came under the guidance of this angel, it appeared as if she had abandoned his counsel and chose to listen to the angel instead. Cotton described it as if “the Lord had made her Pastor.” Additionally, the heavenly creature apparently shared “malicious gossip” that Cotton declared to be behavior that was unbecoming and inconsistent with, what was supposed to be, a benevolent creature. Therefore, Cotton was duly convinced that the voice “had no angelical aspect.” His

\(^{105}\) Mather, *Angelographia*, 10.

\(^{106}\) Mather, *Angelographia*, 16.
parishioners were vehemently warned to dismiss and ignore this voice. Heading Cotton’s pastoral advice, the lady reported to have told the apparition, “I desire no more to hear from you; Mr. Mather saies you are a Divel, and I am afraid you are. If you are an Angel of the Lord, give mee a Proof of it.” The spirit evidently provided no such proof and did not return, thus satisfying Mather’s conscience that he has effectively terminated “witchcraft of the most explicit sort.”

Another unnamed female North Church parishioner reported to have experienced an angelic visitation while she was sitting in Cotton’s study. After reviving from a trance-like state, she described “a most Glorious Appearance of An Angel in a Shining Apparel.” As was the Puritan counseling scheme, Cotton warned her to be discerning of diabolical appearances. When the woman left his study, he immediately reported the event to his father who agreed that this was probably a work of the devil. Later, at an all-women’s prayer gathering, the same lady reported to have been visited again and this time by more than one angel who had messages for both her as well as Cotton. One of the angels addressed skepticism of Cotton:

Our Friend Mather is Apt to doubt we are good Angels, but tell him for to Convince him that we are these things, for he’ll be here in half an hour, that he’s now Studying Such a Sermon on Such a Test, and that such and such Thoughts have occurr’d to him lately, for we are assisting him in his Composure of and lately Suggested such thoughts to his Mind.

This angelic prophecy proved true when, upon his arrival, Cotton had been studying for a sermon. The angels expressed to the woman that because of Increase’s troubled manner due to their appearance, “we will, because we loath to grieve him, never visit you anymore.”

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In both instances, the angelic appearances validated their presence by reporting things otherwise mysterious to their viewers. However, this type of mysterious knowledge created skepticism around their appearances and involvement in human affairs. The Puritans viewed any celestial message of providential occurrence as divine revelation, a dangerous step, the Puritans believed, in asserting precise intelligence of God’s plans for future events. Given their robust adherence to the biblical doctrine of predestination, in which an individual’s eternal destiny—election or damnation—continued to be unknown to mortal men until the day of judgment, the Puritans readily searched for divine determination, avoiding alleged evidence of spiritual assurance.

Cotton’s personal angelic visit did not include any speculation or disseminated knowledge of his eternal destiny, and therefore, remains within the bounds of theological plausibility. Instead, the shimmering, dressed in white, winged figure, foretold of Cotton’s prodigious impact on earth through his writing and publishing: “The fate of this youth should be to find full expression for what in him was best,” the angel said, and he predicted that Cotton’s authority would widely spread, “not only in America, but in Europe” as well. Cotton was not deterred from justifying his own encounter with an angel, even to the point that it presented a significant challenge to his father’s persistence regarding the invisibility of angels. He wrote, “I do not believe that some great Things are to bee done for mee by the Angels of God.”109 In response to the angelic encounter, Cotton resolved not to abuse such a holy privilege and vowed to continue in accomplishing the work of God by being more useful to the poor and sick. Additionally, Cotton was carefully discreet, disclosing in his diary that he would hide “with all prudent Secrecy, whatever extraordinary Things, I may perceive done for mee by the Angels, who love Secrecy in their Administrations.”110

109 Ford, The Diary of Cotton Mather, 163.

110 Ford, The Diary of Cotton Mather, 163. For further thoughts on angels, see Cotton Mather, sermon notes, Boston, Church Records Sermons Notes 1690–1694/5, September 3, 1693, American
As religious fervor and awakening swept across the colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, angelic sightings became a common feature in the writings of believers. Stories of heavenly visitations, told privately in intimate circles when a family member neared death, illustrate ordinary people’s use of the supernatural to assuage their fears of the unknown beyond the grave. In February 1712, the Reverend Joseph Standen wrote a letter to his friend, the Reverend Benjamin Coleman (1673–1747), about his own son’s repeated visions during a smallpox epidemic. The boy, who was only nine years old, was distressingly ill with the common disease. The father described how

his Pain & Torment was so great that his face seemed convuls’d with the sudden Twitches and Agonies which almost every Moment he suffered . . . he went blind and had purple blotches mixed in with the pox some as broad as the Nail of one’s figure . . . he then began violent vomiting of blood.111

Throughout his illness, the boy seemed to sense the imminence of death, and indeed he continually asked to be delivered from the disease he suffered. For fifty days he greatly struggled with “exquisite Torture,” especially in his bowels and joints. His father later wrote Coleman that his son repeatedly cried, “Pray Father pray to God that I may die,” and his repeated earnest appeal was, “Dear God, Let me die: pray Dear God take Me out of the world: Oh! When Shall I die?” The father explained how an angelic vision of the boy’s four brothers, one of whom had already succumbed to death, seemed to calm the boy and prepare him for his own death. The dying boy’s visitation by his angelic brothers, with “shining Crowns of God on their Heads,” was undoubtedly real, according to Standen. The father explained how his son was “certainly aware this story he always told the same way with many particular circumstances.” It was reported that now convinced

Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

111 Revd Joseph Standen to Revd Benjamin Colman, February 1712-1713, MHS Jenks Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
of his own salvation—and of his father’s similar confidence—the child passed away peacefully.112

Private angelic encounters may have been encouraged by the publication of stories about angels, which revealed similar optimism about salvation.113 Published anonymously in the 1750s, Heavenly Damsel described a young girl’s ardent search for what was to be her final destination after death, rather than waiting for God’s grace: “Her Thoughts her Words her Actions were divine/How to gain Heaven she spent all her Time.” In response to her seemingly holy search into the divine, she was rewarded with an angelic encounter. One day, traveling home from school, she stopped to read and contemplate Matthew 27 when a “Person in bright Rayment, whose Hair was as White as Flaxen and whose Face shone like Gold approached her, and spake unto her.” The celestial being declared, “Dear Child when thou of Life are dispossest, Thy Soul shall go into eternal Rest, With God and Christ, with Saints and Angels swell.” Stunned by the presence of this heavenly messenger and his message, upon arriving at home immediately relayed the event to her mother and retired to bed. The next day, in accordance with the message delivered by the angel, the girl was stricken ill and soon died while calling for the angels to guide her to the hearafter.114

By the beginning of the Great Awakening in the 1730s, angelic sightings became a matter of life and death for those who were severely distressed by the reality of

112 Revd Joseph Standen to Revd Benjamin Colman, MHS Jenks Papers.


114 The Heavenly Damsel: or the Parents Blessing Being a True Relation of the Early Piety of a Young Damsel of Nine Years of Age (Newport, RI: n.p., 1755). See also Joseph Emerson, Early Piety Encouraged. A Discourse Occasion’d by the Joyful and Triumphant Death of a Young Woman of Malden, Who Died of the Throat-Distemper (Boston: J. Draper, 1738). This story of a young girl on her deathbed, wishing that her death would come: “O Mother, she said, I see Christ, and the Angels fluttering over me!” At another time, she said, “The Angels stand ready to carry me into Abraham’s Bosom.” The Heavenly Damsel, 26.
their eternal destination. The democratization of American religion signaled the erosion of ministerial authority, challenges of the rise of new denominations of Baptists and Methodists, and the expansion of church membership as the religious culture of the eighteenth-century became as diverse as it was inclusive.115 Frequent angelic sightings suggest that an amplified recognition of supernatural contact served as a means of being assured of one’s own eternal destiny, and must be considered as part of the trend toward polarization that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the mid-eighteenth century, believers could see angels, find themselves transported to other worlds, convincingly tell others about their journeys, and even preach based on the new authority vested in them by God and his angels.

**Conclusion**

If they were not sure of much else regarding the celestial world, the Puritans were confident in the existence of angels. Their angelology always commences with the eternal decree of God, and continues with the angelic creation, their confirmation (and the fall of others), and their central role in redemptive history. The Puritans always believed the role of angels extended not only through this present age but also into future glory. The Westminster Larger Catechism provides an excellent guide in outlining a brief overview of the Puritan’s theology of angels.

The Larger Catechism (Q. 13), citing 1 Timothy 5:21 (“the elect angels”), says, “God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace . . . hath elected some angels to glory.”116 God “passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of


the glory of his justice." The election and reprobation of the angels has a clear parallel, in Puritan theology, with the election and reprobation of man. The Puritans believed God’s predestination of angels lies within the secret counsels and mystery of God and therefore cannot be known by humans. Thomas Ridgley gave this particular subject only one paragraph within the context of election, observing that whereas men are “chosen unto salvation” from sin and “chosen in Christ,” neither can be said of elect angels. As their mediator, Christ is the head of elect men, but he did not redeem angels in the same manner as man.

The Larger Catechism (Q. 16) says, “God created all angels” (Col 1:16). Increase Mather writes, “The angels are as much beholden to God for their beings as the poorest worm on earth.” Samuel Willard said the creation of the “heavens” in Genesis 1:1 refers to “the third heaven,” which includes the angels. The angels were “singing and shouting” in the “morning or beginning of creation,” according to Job 38:7, so it logically follows, according to Willard, that the angels were created “in the first moment of time.”

The Larger Catechism (Q. 19) states that God permitted the fall of some angels and “established the rest in holiness and happiness.” If some angels are “elect” (1 Tim 5:21), then, as Ridgley says, it follows that God’s supreme purpose was to give them “the grace of confirmation” so that they would never fall into sin but persevere in “holiness and

117 The Westminster Confession, 178.
118 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:263.
119 Ridgley, A Body of Divinity, 1:283.
120 The Westminster Confession, 178.
121 Mather, Angelographia, 6.
122 Willard, A Compleat Body of Divinity, 111-12.
123 The Westminster Confession, 179.
happiness.” Regarding the time and manner of this confirmation is “to enter too far into things out of our reach,” Ridgley writes.

The Larger Catechism (Q. 19) says the employment of the angels today is by God “at his pleasure, in the administrations of his power, mercy, and justice.” William Ames (1576–1633) said the work of angels is “to celebrate the glory of God and execute his commandments (Ps 103:20), especially for the heirs of eternal life” (Heb 1:14; Ps 91:11; 34:7). As worshipers of God, angels were created for “the noble and delightful work of praise,” Ridgley explains. They praised God from the dawn of creation (Job 38:7), sang his glories at the incarnation of Christ (Luke 15:7, 10) and in the future will join the spirits of righteous men made perfect in heaven to sing of the worthiness of the Lamb (Heb 12:22–23; Rev 5:11–12). Angels especially find enjoyment in the gospel (1 Pet 1:12). Thomas Manton writes, “As we behold the sun that shineth to us from their part of the world, so do [the angels] behold the sun of righteousness from our part of the world, even Jesus Christ the Lord, in all the acts of his meditation . . . with wonder and reverence.” Isaac Ambrose notes that angels are the messengers and soldiers of God in “ever running errands betwixt heaven and earth.” The Puritans were assured that angels were significantly involved in the ministration of the providence of God throughout the history of the world. James Ussher (1581–1656) states that the angelic hosts have

126 *The Westminster Confession*, 179.
130 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 476.
general duties “in respect of all creatures,” specifically, “That they are the instruments and ministers of God for the administration and government of the whole world.”

Increase Mather says God is to His angels as a general is to his soldiers. Ambrose writes,

Upon this ground is the Lord very often called the Lord of hosts, i.e. the Lord of angels, for so Jacob called the two armies of angels, God’s “host;” and the multitude of angels that praised God at Christ’s nativity “a multitude of the heavenly hosts.” Look, as commanders say to their soldiers, go, and they go; so saith God to his angels, go and they go.

Angels also appear as central figures within the eschatology of the Larger Catechism, which states that Christ will judge the world “with all his holy angels” (Q. 56; cf. Matt 25:31). The Lord will judge “angels and men” (Q. 88). The wicked will be cast out of the presence of God, his saints, and “all his holy angels” (Q. 89). The saints will then join Christ in judging “reprobate angels and men” (Q. 90). Ambrose says that when the day of resurrection comes, the angels will be sent forth by Christ to gather his elect in glorified bodies (Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:16), and affirms with medieval scholastics that the angels will gather the dust of men’s corpses and assemble them into whole bodies, although only God can restore the soul, life, and animation to these bodies. The angels will bring men to Christ’s judgment seat where He will separate the righteous from the wicked (Matt 13:36–43). The angels will then serve as witnesses to Christ’s judgment of men (Luke 12:8). In the future kingdom, angels and saints will join together in sweet harmony and worship in glorifying God for all eternity.

The Puritans approached the subject of angels with great caution choosing to

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133 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 482.

134 Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 553-57.
have their thoughts about the angelic operate within a framework of the meditation of Christ alone and the glory of God alone. Ambrose writes, “We have far less written in God’s word of the nature of angels, than of God himself; because the knowledge of God is far more practical, and less controversial, and more necessary to salvation.” Therefore, he advises, “O then let us eye God, and eye Jesus Christ, in all, above all, and beyond all angel-ministration.” Similarly, Increase Mather challenges his readers: “Behold the majesty of the great God, who hath such glorious creatures as the angels are, to wait upon him, and to do his pleasure. . . . A king hath lords and nobles, the greatest of the kingdom about him, as his servants. But the great God, the King of heaven, hath those that are higher than they, and more” (Ps 68:17; Dan 7:10).

Attention now turns to the angelology of Jonathan Edwards whose great interest in the subject of angels did not lie in their visitations to earth or their private messages to humans, but almost exclusively in their mission and function within the framework of redemptive history. Edwards returned again and again to the topic of the angelic in his Miscellanies. He presented within these private musings a well-defined framework of ideas and progressively refined and embellished it over some thirty-five years. Given the length and consistency with which he wrote about the celestial beings, Edwards did not seem to regard the particular theme of angels as secondary or tangential, but as worthy of biblical and theological investigation.

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135 Ambrose, War with Devils, 480.
136 Ambrose, War with Devils, 537.
137 Mather, Angelographia, 21.
CHAPTER 5
THE ANGELOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

Christ is the head of the angels, and that the angels are united to him as part of his body.¹
Jonathan Edwards

The work of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) served as a brilliant example of
the vigor of the Puritans’ inherited Calvinism.² Historian Mark Noll writes,

Twentieth-century students are partially correct in drawing attention to the modernity
of Edwards’ intellectual universe, for he was influenced by the sensationalist
epistemology of Locke’s Essay on Human Understanding, he marveled at the lofty
regularities portrayed in Newton’s science, and he accepted the affectional emphases
in the new moral philosophy of his age. But if he was the colonial American who
most deeply engaged the new era’s thought, he was also the colonial American who
most thoroughly repudiated it.³

While studying theology after his graduation from Yale College in 1720,
Edwards experienced a conversion during which, as he later writes, “There came into my
soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being.”⁴ To
properly communicate this divine glory became his preeminent burden as a pastor-
theologian. While pastoring the historical Congregational Church in Northampton,
Massachusetts, Edwards participated in intense seasons of revival in 1734–1735 and again
in 1740–1742. Yet in 1750, Edwards was overwhelming dismissed from his pulpit in

Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 60.


³ Noll, America’s God, 22-23.

George S. Claghorn (1998), 792.
Northampton when he challenged the long-established practice of admitting individuals to the Lord’s table in communion when they could not give credible testimony as to the genuineness of their saving faith. This seeming crisis for Edwards and his large family, and subsequent move to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, proved to be the season in which he would finish several theological treatises for which he later won theological renown. On March 22, 1758, Edwards died from an inoculation against smallpox, only weeks after his installation as president of the College of New Jersey in Princeton.

The unifying epicenter of Edwards’ theology was the glory of God, Noll states, “Depicted as an active, harmonious, ever-unfolding source of absolutely perfect Being marked by supernal beauty and love.” It is within this grand theological framework that Edwards presents his views of angels. Angelology, for Edwards, was viewed as a corollary of Christology. However, this centralized focus on Christ did not mean that Edwards’ works were not free from speculation regarding the angelic world. Within the private musings of his miscellaneous observations, the reader discovers numerous unexpected statements concerning the heavenly spiritual realm. For example, he described Lucifer as a “type of Christ,” and also stated that Christ replaced Lucifer as the “head of angels.” In addition, he also defined the angelic rebellion and fall as taking place when the angels learned of God’s plan of incarnation for his son. Upon learning that the son of God would become human to redeem the elect, the angels were brought to temptation and thus fell from their glorious state. More than other theologians before him, Edwards highlighted the ascension of Christ and his “enthronization” in heaven as a significant event in the disclosing of redemptive history. For Edwards, the ascension of Christ was the event at

5 Noll, America’s God, 23.

6 Noll, America’s God, 23.

which Christ became the “head of angels” and the unfallen angels were, for the first time, “confirmed” in grace so that they could be removed forever from the danger of sinning.

Edwards’ angelology was traditional in its central focus and emphasized three standard medieval themes of creation, fall, and confirmation of angels. Yet, Edwards’ angelology was innovative in its construal of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels and its portrayal of their role within the framework of redemptive history. Rather than stationing the angels to a distant celestial realm, Edwards conceived the angels as human-like in their capacity for temptation, joy, outrage, surprise, development, wonder, perseverance, and growth. Angels and humans were two parts of “one society” in heaven that was itself in an eternally “progressive state.”

The History of Redemption

Between March and August 1739, Edwards delivered thirty sermons on the Old Testament text of Isaiah 51:8: “For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation” (KJV). The doctrine Edwards provided for his series was continuous from the first sermon to the last, and was basically stated, “The Work of Redemption is a work that God carries on from the fall of man to the end of the world.” Expanding on this presented doctrine, Edwards explains,

The generations of mankind on the earth did not begin till after the fall. The beginning of the posterity of our first parents was after the fall, for all his posterity by ordinary generation are partakers of the fall and the corruption of nature that followed from it. And these generations by which the human race is propagated shall continue to the end of the world; so these two are the limits of the generations of men on the earth: the fall of man, the beginning, and the end of the world—the Day of Judgment—its end. The same are the limits of the Work of Redemption as to those progressive

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8 Keck explains, “The three events of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels . . . constitute the essential point of departure for understanding the angels,” David Keck, Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.

works of God by which that redemption is brought about and accomplished, though not as to the fruits of it, for they as was said before shall be to all eternity. The work of salvation and the Work of Redemption are the same thing. What is sometimes in Scripture called God's saving his people is in others called his redeeming them; so Christ is called both the Savior and the Redeemer of his people.¹⁰

Historian Harry S. Stout comments on the simplicity of Edwards’ doctrine and that it is “surprisingly straightforward and almost common place,” however this covers “a vast apparatus of reflection.”¹¹

The substance of this sermon series was historical and proves to be quite unique among Edwards’ sermon corpus. Stout points out that this series “differed decisively from anything Edwards had preached before or, for that matter, after.”¹² In contrast to his other sermons, there was something more comprehensive and complex in this lengthy 1739 series. Desiring to explore the doctrine of redemption and weave its thread within the history of the cosmos, Edwards organized these sermons differently than his other preaching.¹³ In order that his doctrine might be understood in all its comprehensiveness, Edwards shifted it away from the polemical confines of the academy and delivered it as a narrative story.

Stout points out, “This Work of Redemption is so much the greatest of all the works of God, that all other works are to be looked upon either as part of it, or appendages


¹³ Stout explains, The most obvious difference was the sheer length of the series. Earlier sermon series, save for Charity and Its Fruits, encompassed only three or four sermons. In his 1739 series, Edwards strove for something more comprehensive and complex than could be contained in a few sermons. Moreover, each of these sermons was structurally incomplete—a Doctrine without an Application, or an Application without a Use. Entire preaching units functioned as mere parts of a traditional sermon rather than as self-contained entities complete unto themselves. Thus, text and doctrine were explicated in Sermon 1, “reasons” in the form of historical epochs from the fall to incarnation in Sermons 2 through 20, an Application in Sermons 21 through 25, and an “Improvement” in Sermons 29 and 30. (Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in WJE, 22:11)
to it, or are some way reducible to it.”14 The themes developed by Edwards in the framework of this discourse on redemption engaged him both directly and indirectly in most of the expositions he preached throughout this time period. These themes can be summarized under three traditional headings: “Heaven,” “Earth,” and “Hell.” When Edwards took a principal role in the Great Awakening, he appealed to these same classifications to grasp the significance and validity of the revivals and to shape his public discourses. It is within this same context that Edwards shapes his view of angels and their prominent involvement in redemptive history.

Angels play a frequent role in the tri-world narrative that Edwards constructs. He drew these themes out of his “Miscellanies” and included them in his sermons, reminding his congregants, “The creating heaven was in order to the Work of Redemption; it was to be an habitation for the redeemed and the Redeemer, Matthew 25:34. Angels [were created to be] ministering spirits [to the inhabitants of the] lower world [which is] to be the stage of the wonderful Work [of Redemption].”15 Throughout the sermons in the 1739 series, Edwards positions the angelic beings at the epicenter of his teachings: “Scripture is filled,” he said, “with instances when God hath . . . sent angels to bring divine instructions to men.”16 Angels, in heaven, “spend much of their time in searching into the great things of divinity, and endeavoring to acquire knowledge in them.”17 When they are not employed in ministration and singing, Edwards considered that angels may be studying. Frequently, Edwards asks his parishioners to follow the example of angels and mimic their


diligence in the study of Scripture. Both angels and humanity, Edwards assured, will find “the glorious work of redemption” at the heart of that study:

[W]e ourselves may become like angels, and like God himself in our measure . . . Such things as these have been the main subject of the study of the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and the most excellent men that ever were in the world, and are also the subject of the study of the angels in heaven.18

According to Edwards, the love of Christ stands at the center of all angelic contemplation vis-à-vis redemption: “He is so lovely and excellent that the angels in heaven do greatly love him; their hearts overflow with love to him, and they are continually, day and night without ceasing, praising him and giving him glory.”19

Though angels find their origin and citizenship in the empyrean heaven, Edwards agreed with the medieval theologians that they also spend a substantial amount of time as ministering spirits to humanity. They exist, he thought, as invisible armies around all true believers in Christ. Edwards vehemently rejected the Roman Catholic teaching of “guardian angels” as being assigned to children at the event of their baptism, but frequently reminded children in his Northampton congregation that angels were chiefly attentive to them. In August 1740, in his sermon, “Children Out to Love the Lord Jesus Christ Above All,” Edwards comforted his young hearers with these words:

If you truly love Christ, all the glorious angels of heaven will love you. For they delight in those that love Christ; they love to see such a sight as children giving their hearts to Christ. There will be joy in heaven among the angels that day that you begin to love Christ. And they will be your angels; they will take care of you while you sleep, and God will give ‘em charge to keep you in all your ways.20

Edwards was careful to emphasize that the care of angels has not been exclusively reserved for only children, nor are angels childish in their mannerisms and actions. For Edwards, the angels were ever-present realities and there existed the potential for the nature of


humanity to take on the form of angelic. In essence, Edwards believed the angels offered a magnification of existence, unavailable to fallen humanity.

**Heaven: A World of Love**

While Edwards’ redemption narrative project is grounded upon earth, he always began his discussion in the portals of heaven within the eternal communications of the triune God and the creation of the angelic beings. For Edwards, while transcending formal theology, heaven situated the normal person on the same level as the most sophisticated academic. Like earth, heaven was not created eternal but was created for the same end: the work of redemption. In his *Miscellanies*, Edwards contemplates the reality of imperceptible worlds: “Heaven is part of the universe that, in the first creation and the disposition of things that was made in the beginning, was appropriated to God to be that part of the universe that should be his residence, while other parts were destined to other uses.” In the sermons series “Charity and Its Fruits,” delivered just prior to the 1739 series on redemption, Edwards defines heaven as “a world of love,” fashioned “to be the place of God’s glorious presence.” He continued,

There dwells God the Father, and so the Son, who are united in infinitely dear and incomprehensible mutual love. There dwells God the Father, who is the Father of mercies, and so the Father of love, who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life [John 3:16]. There dwells Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Prince of peace and love, who so loved the world that he shed his blood, and poured out his soul unto death for it. There dwells the Mediator, by whom all God's love is expressed to the saints, by whom the fruits of it have been purchased, and through whom they are communicated, and through whom love is imparted to the hearts of all the church. There Christ dwells in both his natures, his human and divine, sitting with the Father in the same throne. There is the Holy Spirit, the spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, all flows out or is breathed forth in love, and by

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whose immediate influence all holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the church [cf. Romans 5:5]. There in heaven this fountain of love, this eternal three in one, is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it.24

In similarity with the earth, heaven was a habitation with a social, spiritual, and physical geography. Edwards believed that in addition to a spiritual architecture that existed in heaven because of the spiritual presence of the triune God and the angelic beings, heaven was also a very physical place where gardens, temples, fountains, and cities existed. Moreover, he saw heaven as the eternal dwelling place of God’s elect, the crown of the martyrs, and the fount of glorious enlightenment.25 Edwards said heaven was a place where nothing “but lovely objects” dwell.26 He commented, “There is no odious or polluted person or thing to be seen there. There is nothing wicked and unholy.”27 Harry Stout writes, “At the center of Edwards’ Dantean vision of heaven was supernatural light not unlike the ‘blazing point’ of Paradiso, with angels spinning a ring of light.”28 Heaven contained angels, saints, and of course, the Trinitarian Godhead. These three holy assemblies constitute and form a “divine “society.”29 Edwards understood heaven as “the only way that ever has been contrived for the gathering together of angels and men into one society, and one place of habitation.”30

In Miscellanies 952, Edwards enters a lengthy entry concerning heaven: “There is nothing in the Scripture that in the least intimates the external heaven or paradise to be

unchangeable, and not capable of being perfected and exalted to higher glory.” Edwards carefully distinguishes the person of God from where God has chosen to reveal his glory. Only God is unchangeable, as Edwards stresses, “It is too much honor to any created thing to suppose it to be so perfect that no occasion whatsoever, even the rewarding of the infinite merits of the infinitely beloved Son of God himself, is occasion great enough for altering it.” The elect experience a heaven that is not static but is inherently and necessarily dynamic. However, the “place” where God dwells, to use problematic language in describing the confines of the infinite, is truly unchangeable. This “heaven” is the “state of God’s own infinite and unchangeable glory,” and is above and beyond the created realms (including the created heavens). Edwards writes,

The only heaven that is unalterable is the state of God’s own infinite and unchangeable glory, the heaven which God dwelt in from all eternity, which is absolutely of infinite height and infinite glory, and which may metaphorically be represented as the heaven that was the eternal abode of the blessed Trinity, and of the happiness and glory they have one in another; and is an heaven that is uncreated, and the heaven from whence God infinitely stoops to behold the things done in the created paradise, and of which [we] conceive of as the infinite and unchangeable expanse of space that is above and beyond the whole universe, and encompasses the whole, is the shadow.

The starting assumption for Edwards is the perfection and immutability of God, and, his inner life is his own infinite glory. Two worlds were created by God which correspond to the two orders of creatures, one for humanity and one for angels. While the lower world of man is corruptible, and the upper world of angels is incorruptible, both


33 In his *The Blank Bible*, Edwards writes musing on Isa 57:15: Eternity that God inhabits is here spoken of as something infinitely before and infinitely above the whole creation, even above the highest heavens, “the high and holy place” spoken of in the following words. It is the eternal state of his infinite glory and blessedness in which the persons of the Trinity dwell together, infinitely above heaven, and in which they ever did dwell. (Jonathan Edwards, “Isaiah 57:15,” in *WJE*, vol. 24, *The Blank Bible*, ed. Stephen Stein [2006], 691)

worlds are mutable. Incorruptibility is only truly predicable of God and thereby adheres derivatively to that which God upholds and wills as such. Heaven’s incorruptibility does not derive from itself but is solely based upon divine grace and will. On the other hand, mutability is the mode of creation. Creatures exist, and will always exist, mutably. Mutability inheres both for the redeemed and the unregenerate, who are both journeying toward a “universal change.” Edwards notes, “This universal change shall be at the end of the world, or immediately after the day of judgment,” the regenerate being glorified and the unregenerate perishing.

To develop this aspect of heaven, Edwards develops the conception of various “eras” of heaven, which provide context for the beatific vision of God in glory. In this conceptualization, Edwards follows his argument in End of Creation: God communicates his infinite fullness to finite creatures for his own glory, which never ceases nor rests in completion. Therefore, once the progressive reality of heaven is understood, statements concerning the angels in Edwards’ Miscellanies are able to be placed within a framework and context of the whole of redemptive history. Edwards provides three eras in the history of heaven: (1) from creation to Christ’s ascension; (2) from Christ’s ascension to consummation; and (3) from consummation to eternity.

First Era: From Creation to Christ’s Ascension

To properly understand Edwards on heaven, his Miscellanies must be separated into the appropriate periods of the history of heaven. A failure to differentiate these eras adequately, and divide the material according to the correct age, muddies the waters even more because of Edwards’ sporadic writings. For example, Edwards uses the

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36 In so doing, I am walking through Edwards’ discussion of the periods of heaven in his “Miscellanies” entries as well as tracking alongside Robert W. Caldwell’s section on heaven in his book Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 174-84.
term heaven broadly, but he always denotes a specific moment in that perfect but mutable realm, easily mistaken as referencing consummation alone.

Robert W. Caldwell, whose evaluation I am following closely, names this first period because Edwards never does so specifically. This period, Caldwell summarizes, is an age of probation for the angels. Only God is immutable, Edwards proposed, and thus even the angels, the inhabitants of the highest heavens and those who have the greatest access to the holy are subject to change. Edwards writes, “But the highest heavens in their own nature are capable of ruin, in the highest and most excellent part of it, in the heart of all that part of creation, and so of the whole creation, viz. Lucifer.” In Miscellanies 936, Edwards explains Lucifer’s fall:

But when it was revealed to him, that as high and glorious as he was, that he must be a ministering spirit to the race of mankind that he had seen newly created, that appeared so feeble, mean and despisiable, so vastly inferior not only to him, but prince of the angels and head of the universe, but also to the inferior angels, and that he must be subject to one of that race that should hereafter be born, he could not bear it. This occasioned his fall, and now he with the other angels he drew away with him are fallen. This first period of the history of heaven makes the probation of the angels—where some fall and some prove themselves faithful. It also demarcates the angels’ trial of obedience, either serving Christ and the elect in the work of redemption, or rebelling.

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38 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 952,” in WJE, 20:211. Edwards’ use of “highest heavens” here is unfortunate after his own delineation between “God’s heaven,” which one would assume to be the highest, and heaven itself.

39 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in WJE, 20:191. It is noteworthy that the fall of the angels, and one could say with it, the fall of the world, was a response to the work of redemption. This is the beginning parallelism of the tri-world vision.

40 Edwards purports,
Their work and service that was appointed them, that was the trial of their obedience, was to serve Christ and his elect people in this affair; and it was by obeying Christ as his servants in this affair that they actually obtained eternal life.” Edwards purports, “Their work and service that was appointed them, that was the trial of their obedience, was to serve Christ and his elect people in this affair; and it was by obeying Christ as his servants in this affair that they actually obtained eternal life.” (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 937,” in WJE, 20:197)
Christ, the judge of the angels, will not end their period of testing until his return (his ascension back into heaven after his death and resurrection).\(^4\) One of the primary tasks of the angels prior to the ascension of Christ is to minister to Christ and his church in the world as God’s plan of redemption is carried forth. The work of Christ in the world, as an extension of his purpose in creation, is a manifestation of his glory, which the angels partake of through beholding:

As the perfections of God are manifested to all creatures . . . by the fruits of those perfections, or God’s works – the wisdom of God appears by his wise works, and his power by his powerful works, his holiness and justice by his holy and just acts . . . so the glorious angels have the great manifestations of the glory of God by what they see in the work of men’s redemption, and especially in the death and sufferings of Christ.\(^4\)

The importance of this final statement should not go unnoticed. Angels grow in knowledge of God through Christ’s work in the world. In Miscellanies 555, Edwards reasons, “One end of the creation of the angels, and giving them such great understanding, was that they might be fit witnesses and spectators of God’s works here below, and might behold all parts of the divine scheme.”\(^4\) As the greatest of God’s designs, the work of redemption is revelation. The angels, with the “best seats in the house,” watch and grow as they meditate upon God’s action in the world. God saw fit, Edwards explains, to have creatures of great discernment and understanding, “that they might behold the world series, from the beginning to the consummation of all things.”\(^4\) Mortal man’s imperfect perception of God’s glory in the work of redemption is counteracted by the angels in heaven.

\(^4\) Edwards says, “The Lord Jesus Christ, God-man, is the judge of the angels that gives them the reward of eternal life. They did not enjoy perfect rest till he ascended and confirmed them.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 937,” in WJE, 20:197-98.


Furthermore, Edwards suggests that the elect angels grew in holiness and happiness after Satan and his angels fell because they obtained knowledge of God and knowledge of themselves, of good and evil, and advanced in the way of humility. To this he adds, “What they beheld of the glory of God in the face of Christ as man’s Redeemer, and especially in Christ’s humiliation, greatly increased their holiness and their obedience.” Because of their sight of God, the angels grow in holiness, which is found in beholding God, as God enacts the work of redemption. God is known to a greater degree in his action, most specifically his redeeming action. Christ’s operation with the angels, in short, mirrors Christ’s work with humankind; angels are confirmed upon their initial acceptance of Christ and his work but are not rewarded eternal life until judgment.

Alongside the angels, the saints attend to God’s redemptive activity through Christ to grow their knowledge of God. As revelation to the church is progressive, so is the revelation—and therefore knowledge, delight, and joy—in heaven. Edwards states,

> It seems to me probable that that part of the church that is in heaven have been, from the beginning of the world, progressive in their light and in their happiness, as the church on earth has; and that much of their happiness has consisted in seeing the progressive wonderful doings of God with respect to his church here in this world. . . . It seems to me probable that that part of the church that is in heaven have been, from the beginning of the world, progressive in their light and in their happiness, as the

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46 Edwards says, “Man is confirmed when he first believes in Christ, but this work is not done till death, and the reward not bestowed till then.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 947,” in *WJE*, 20:204.

47 Edwards states,

The saints, in going out of this world and ascending into heaven, don’t go out of sight of the affairs that appertain to Christ’s kingdom and church here, and things appertaining to that great work of redemption that is carrying on here; but, on the contrary, go out of a state of obscurity and ascend above the mists and clouds into the bright light. And ascending to a pinnacle in the very center of light, where everything appears in clear view, the saints that are ascended to heaven have advantage to view the state of Christ’s kingdom, in this world, and the works of the new creation here, as much greater than they had before; as a man that ascends to the top of an high mountain has a greater advantage to view the face of the earth than he had while he was below in a deep valley or forest below, surrounded on every side with those things that impeded and limited his sight. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 1098,” *WJE*, 20:472)
church on earth has; and that much of their happiness has consisted in seeing the progressive wonderful doings of God with respect to his church here in this world.\textsuperscript{48}

In \textit{Miscellanies} 372, Edwards writes, “Their joy is continually increased, as they see the purposes of God’s grace unfolded in his wondrous providences towards his church.”\textsuperscript{49}

This hints at Edwards’ theological and progressive understanding of history, and the increase of revelation within it.\textsuperscript{50} The saints exponentially increase in happiness as they converse with Christ and witness his glorious work of redemption. It is here where Edwards’ trifold vision of theology comes to the forefront. Because of his Christological focus of revelation and his emphasis on the revelatory nature of the work of Christ, the glorified saints and angels progress in knowledge only as Christ enacts his work of redemption on earth. As he writes in \textit{Miscellanies} 421, “The church in heaven and the church on earth are more one people, one city, and one family than generally imagined,”\textsuperscript{51} and again in \textit{Miscellanies} 529, “Shall the royal family be kept in ignorance of the success of the affairs of the kingdom?”\textsuperscript{52} The work of redemption, as the pinnacle of God’s work, is the organizing event of revelation, which glorified saints, angels, and the elect behold to progressively grow in their knowledge.

During this first period of heaven, angels are in probation, awaiting their confirmation in Christ, the God-man, who will reign in heaven forever. The glorified saints enter God’s family and alongside angels obtain their happiness and joy through a visual


\textsuperscript{50} Edwards states, “And that their joy is increasing and will be increasing, as God gradually in his providence unveils his glory till the last day.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 372,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:445.


apprehension of the perfections, work, and glory of God. Therefore, the happiness and 
perfecting of the elect in heaven is tied directly to God’s work of redemption in the world; 
or, as Edwards writes in Miscellanies 777, “The church in heaven and the church on earth 
are so united, that the glory of the one is not advanced and perfected without perfecting 
the glory of the other.”53 Likewise, he explains,

This renders it more probable that the happiness of heaven is PROGRESSIVE, having 
several PERIODS of new accession of glory and blessedness to their state . . . and 
that the same periods that are happy and blessed periods to the church on earth, are 
so also to the church in heaven: as particularly, that the church in heaven had a new 
accession of glory when the church on earth was redeemed out of Egypt . . . that again 
they had another happy period of glorious advancement in the time of the 
establishment of the throne of David . . . and again had another happy period of new 
accession of glory at the redemption of the church on earth out of Babylon; and that 
the light, and love, and glory of the church in heaven was as much advanced from 
the period of Christ’s first coming, especially from his ascension into heaven, as of 
the church on earth.54

Edwards followed John Owen (1616–1683), delineating eras of increasing revelation in 
redemptive history. However, unlike Owen, Edwards runs revelation through his tri-
world matrix, as noted here, heaven’s parallel connection to earth. The saintly inhabitants 
of heaven partake of the glory of God in heaven as well as on earth. This does not 
diminish the beauty, splendor, and glory of heaven, but it does denote the particularity of 
heaven’s era in relation to the work of Christ. Therefore, while the glorified saints see 
Christ and the Father in this first era, their sight is still “clouded.”55 It is darkened to the 
degree that their attention is pulled to God’s working in the world. It is only after Christ 
is resurrected that the glorified saints shall see him as he is. Edwards said, “Yet the sight

a fundamental dynamic which courses through the history of heaven consists in the growth of its 
inhabitant’s [sic] happiness, a growth which takes place visually through beholding new ‘accession[s] of 


55 Edwards explains, “But yet the glorified souls of saints in their present state in heaven, 
though they can’t be said properly to see as in an enigma, yet ‘tis but darkly in comparison of what they 
will see after the resurrection.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 710,” in WJE, 18:337.
that the saints [in heaven] shall have at the resurrection is spoken of as if it were the first sight, wherein they could see him as he is.’”\textsuperscript{56} The first era of heaven is defined by a sight that is pulled toward earth, where God reveals himself through the history of redemption. As such, this era of heaven’s history always looks ahead to the completion of Christ’s work and the anticipation that he will reign over saints and angels for all of eternity.

**Second Era: From Ascension to Consummation**

If heaven is affected by Christ’s work of redemption on earth, which Edwards takes as axiomatic, then how much more are the inhabitants of heaven affected when the king returns? With continued Christocentric emphasis, Edwards claims, “The coming of Christ, I believe, made an exceeding great addition to the happiness of the saints of Old Testament who were in heaven, and especially was the day of his ascension a joyful day amongst them.”\textsuperscript{57} Prior to the ascension of Christ, the mode of being for the inhabitants was preparatory, awaiting the arrival of the coming bridegroom.\textsuperscript{58} But even this second era is “between the times” for the heavenly community.\textsuperscript{59} In *Miscellanies* 435, Edwards states, “All things in heaven and earth and throughout the universe are in a state of preparation for the state of consummation; all the wheels are going, none of them stop, and all are moving in a direction to the last and most perfect state.”\textsuperscript{60} Recalling the wheels

\textsuperscript{56} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 710,” in *WJE*, 18:337.

\textsuperscript{57} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 372,” in *WJE*, 444-45.

\textsuperscript{58} Edwards explains, “But the more properly perfect and consummate state of God’s people, of the church, will be after the resurrection; and the whole is now only a growing and preparing for that state. All things that are now done in the world are but preparations for it.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 371,” in *WJE*, 13:443.


\textsuperscript{60} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 435,” in *WJE*, 13:483.
within the wheels, Edwards asserts that the saints in heaven continue to experience the grand countdown to consummation, as the one great wheel continues to complete its turn.

The preparatory reality of this second era of heaven does not diminish the redemptive importance. This era is the necessary penultimate turn of God’s redemptive wheel. Revelation and redemption increase on earth, so too in heaven. Christ’s ascending to heaven was a redemption of the fall of Lucifer, who was created to reign in heaven: “He was the head of the whole society, the captain of the whole host.” Therefore, the risen Christ, upon ascending, fills the vacancy. Because of the fall of Satan, heaven, in a sense, lacked redemption. Until Jesus was raised up to be ruler of heaven, the angelic inhabitants were, as seen clearly in the first era, in a place of probation. Upon his return, the angels in heaven were confirmed, and their eternal status solidified. Edwards argues that Christ, upon his ascension, gave the elect angels the reward of eternal life, and the angels “receive their faithfulness from him as their head and as their Lord.” In this second era, then, the angels enjoy a communion with God that they did not know prior to the incarnation or ascension. Edwards notes,

By this it appears that the angels at Christ’s ascension received their fullness, i.e. their whole reward, all their confirmed life and eternal blessedness, from Christ as their judge. . . . He did not only adjudge it to them, but he gives it to them; and they possess it as united to him in a constant dependence on him, and have that more full enjoyment of God than they before had, as beholding God’s glory in his face and as enjoying God in him, for he is here spoken of not only as their Lord but their head.

The angels’ interest in the incarnation of Christ therefore equals that of the church. Christ’s becoming man was also becoming a creature. God has always “designed to communicate himself to creatures, the way in which he designed to communicate

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himself to elect beloved creatures, all of them, was to unite himself to a created nature, and to become one of the creatures.” Likewise, Christ’s ascension “advanced” the Old Testament saints in heaven and the angels as well as the church on earth. In the mind of Edwards, these groups are connected as one family in Christ. Prior to Christ’s arrival, the heavenly saints and angels were in a state of infancy. The age after the resurrection is therefore a “new age” in the history of heaven, where greater glory, happiness, and joy reign.

Like the first era discussed, the saints and angels in heaven remain intensely aware of the work of redemption, observing with perfect clarity Christ’s kingdom on earth in all its glory, in distinction from the saints on earth, who at present see only as through a glass darkly. Edwards states in *Miscellanies* 529,

> The saints in heaven are under infinitely greater advantages to take the pleasure of beholding how Christ’s kingdom flourishes, than if they were here upon earth: for they can better see and understand the marvelous steps that divine wisdom takes in all that is done, and the glorious ends he accomplishes, and what opposition Satan makes, and how he is baffled and overthrown. . . . They will behold the glory of the divine attributes in his work of providence, infinitely more clearly than we can.

Edwards makes clear that the happiness of heaven “consists very much in BEHOLDING the manifestations that God makes of himself in the WORK OF REDEMPTION.” Creatures cannot have an immediate sight of God but must have their vision of God mediated through Christ.

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67 For instance, Edwards states, “It looks to me probable that the glory of the state of the church after the resurrection will as much exceed the present glory of the spirits of just men made perfect, as the glory of the gospel dispensation exceeds the Mosaic dispensation, or as much as the glory of the state of the church in its first or purest state of it.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 710,” in *WJE*, 18:335.


In Miscellanies 777, Edwards claims that the saints “see and know God in heaven by his Word of speech, for there the saints are with God, and converse with God, and God converses with them by voluntary manifestations and significations of his mind.”\(^{70}\) However, speaking with Christ is not the sole means of knowing God; the saints “see his glory as it is manifested in the work of redemption, which the angels desire to look into, and by which the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the angels.”\(^{71}\) Because of the importance of this statement and its centrality in Edwards’ thought, I quote him at length:

So far as they see God and know him in his works (which is the principal way in which God manifests himself, and to which the manifestation of himself in his Word is subordinate: the manifestations God makes of himself in his works are the principal manifestations of his perfections, and the declarations and teaching of his Word are to lead to those; by God’s declaring and teaching that he is infinitely powerful or wise, the creature believes that he is powerful and wise as he teaches, but in seeing his mighty and wise works, the effects of his power and wisdom the creature not only hears and believes, but sees his power and wisdom: and so of his other perfections) they see and know [him] as he manifests himself in the work of redemption, which [is] the greatest and most glorious of all God’s works, the work of works to which all God’s works are reduced.\(^{72}\)

The way God makes himself known is by Christ in his work of redemption.\(^{73}\) This work of redemption is God’s self-revelation in his image and is the work in which the heavenly inhabitants are very much interested. By beholding his glory, they behold God in his works rather than in his being, which is invisible. Importantly, Edwards claims,


\(^{71}\) Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 777,” in WJE, 18:430.


\(^{73}\) Edwards explains, “His works at the same time are wonderful, and cannot be found out to perfection; especially the work of redemption, which is that work of God about which the science of divinity is chiefly conversant, is full of unsearchable wonders.” Edwards, “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,” in WJE, 22:95.
“That BEATIFICAL VISION that the saints have of God in heaven, is in beholding the manifestations that he makes of himself in the work of redemption.”74 Edwards said,

The saints and angels see God by beholding the displays of his perfections, but the perfections of God are displayed and manifested chiefly by their effects. Thus the chief way wherein the wisdom of God is to be seen is in the wise acts and operations of God, and so of his power, mercy, and justice and other perfections. But these are seen, even by the angels themselves, chiefly by what God does in the work of redemption.75

Edwards also explains that the “business and employment of the saints . . . in contemplation, praise, and conversation, is mainly in contemplating the wonders of this work, in praising God for the displays of his glory and love therein, and in conversing about things appertaining to it.”76

This seeing, enjoying, and conversing with God the Father is all done in Christ, which will be the case throughout eternity. But this is where this age fundamentally differs from the age to come. The saints in heaven grow in holiness by conversing with angels, Christ, and the Father. They behold the glory of God as it is communicated through the history of God’s redemption of the world. In this second era of heaven, this sight is given much greater depth. Not only do the saints and angels in heaven understand more, which is certainly true, but they also know God more. This sight is ultimately perfected in the third and final stage of the church in heaven.

**Third Era: Consummation of All Things**

It is clear up to this juncture that heaven’s inhabitants, saints and angels, grow in their capacity to receive the divine glory and beauty. Likewise, the progress of the church directly relates to the degree of glory revealed, which increases upon each


movement of redemptive history. Edwards reminds his readers that God created the world to glorify himself, “but it was principally that he might glorify him[self] in his disposal of the world, or in the use he intended to make of it, in his providence.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 702,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:284.} In fact, the work of redemption plays such an important role in his understanding of God’s self-glorification that Edwards argues, “It was the end of the creation of heaven: the preparing that blessed and glorious habitation was with an eye to this.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 702,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:284.} Likewise, as seen, the angels were created for this end, that they might serve the Son of God, the Mediator, and, as seen, it was the impetus for Lucifer’s fall.\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 702,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:284.}

Furthermore, God’s end for creation is that the Father might give a spouse to his Son, as Edwards comments in \textit{Miscellanies 702}, so that the Son might have a partner in which he can pour forth his love. The bride/bridegroom metaphor is an overarching image for Edwards’ conception of redemption and orients this final era of heaven as the marriage of the Lamb. Edwards says, “The wedding feast is eternal; and the love and joys, the sons, entertainments and glories of the wedding never will be ended.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 702,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:298. While Edwards does not end up talking about God’s end being to give his Son an image to give his love to, it does serve as a helpful summary of Edwards’ theology of redemption.} Edwards’ use of “beholding,” “manifesting,” and “seeing” calls out this reality, as in \textit{Miscellanies 702}: “Seeing therefore that the love of God has been most \textit{manifested} to them, it will doubtless be most enjoyed by them. . . . God \textit{communicates} his love to enjoyment by \textit{manifestation.”}\footnote{See Janice Knight, \textit{Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 109, emphasis original.}
This third age differs from the others in several ways. First, Christ hands over his representational kingdom to the Father. Second, the saints and angels are fully judged and openly justified, and Christ himself is “openly and publicly and remarkably justified.” Third, the saints are perfected; Christ is glorified in a greater manner than before, and all of heaven changes. Caldwell provides a helpful summary:

Heaven in its final state commences with the resurrection and day of judgment. Afterwards, heaven shall ascend to a new level of happiness, glory, and joy as the following realities obtain: individuals in the church are finally united to their resurrection bodies, the church is no more divided between the upper and lower worlds, all receive their heavenly rewards, and Christ’s bride, the church, enters into the eternal marriage-day feast of the lamb.

Last, picking up on Caldwell’s summary, this day is the true wedding day, the age of the wedding feast, “and marriage is not only for this acquaintance and communion on the wedding day, but in order to it ever after. . . . The glory and exaltation that the Father gives Christ, will not be diminished after the day of judgment. It is this final reality that is of concern. In Miscellanies 742, Edwards states,

When the end comes. . . . God will be all; the church now shall be brought nearer to God the Father, who by his economical office sustains the dignity and appears as the fountain of Deity. And her enjoyment of him shall be more direct: Christ God-man
shall now no longer be instead of the Father to them, but, as I may express it, their head of their enjoyment of God, as it were, the eye to receive the rays of divine glory and love for the whole body, and the ear to hear the sweet expressions of his love, and the mouth to taste the sweetness and feed on the delights of the enjoyment of God—the root of the whole tree planted in God to receive sap and nourishment for every branch.  

In this final age, opposed to the rest, there is no work of redemption to contemplate (not visually at least) “but now only a God who has redeemed.” Each era of heaven focuses more fully on God the Father. This last age of heaven is the perfection and redemption of God’s people in Christ brought before the Father. The saints and angels are fully justified, sanctified, and glorified. Christ’s role as representative of the Father is handed over, and he can enjoy his bride for an eternal wedding feast.

For Edwards, heaven is an asymptotic increase of union and communion with God for eternity—where the sight that delights continues to delight to an ever-increasing degree. The life of mankind, one might say, comes to look more and more like the inner life of God, recognizing that this life is by grace and will always be a finite reflection of God’s infinite glory.

87 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 742,” in WJE, 18:37, emphasis added.

88 Edwards ties God qua Redeemer and God qua Creator closely together. The two roles/identifiers are never far from his conception of God. Even in this final age, both Creator and Redeemer are central realities for Edwards. When heaven is re-created by Christ, it is done so that God’s creating power would be manifest to his elect. Edwards states, The elect creatures, that are the eye and mouth of the creation, that are made to behold God’s works and to give him the glory of them, did not behold the first creation. The angels did not behold the creation of heaven, that most glorious part of creation, nor did they see the creation of themselves. And men beheld no part of God’s work in producing the creation. But the time will come when God will make all things new by a new creation, wherein his power towards the whole will be much more displayed than in the first creation. When God shall effect this creation, men and angels shall see God perform it; they shall see God produce the new heaven and new earth by his mighty power. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 952,” WJE, 20:219)

89 Edwards states, Then God will fully have glorified himself, and glorified his Son and his elect; then he will see that all is very good, and will rejoice in his own works, which will be the joy of all heaven. God will rest and be refreshed; and thenceforward will the inhabitants keep an eternal Sabbath, such as one as all foregoing Sabbaths were but shadows of. (Edwards “Miscellanies, No. 371,” in WJE, 13:444)

Earth

The history of earth, introduced in Edwards’ sermon series on the history of redemption, also made its way into other sermons during this period. Stout writes, “In all these sermons, Edwards left behind his philosophical speculations on the creation of the cosmos as a grand emanation from the mind of God or ‘Being in general’ and turned to the history of the fall and need for salvation.”\footnote{Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in \textit{WJE}, 22:18.} Edwards passed over God’s work in creation entirely in order to emphasize the primacy of redemption in his narrative. In sermon 2 on the Redemption discourse, Edwards confronts his hearers with the historical reality of the fall of Adam and Eve, and subsequently all of their progeny. Edwards posited that before God pronounced his curse upon Adam and Eve and exiled them from the garden, that God informed the angels. Edwards reflects, “We must suppose that God’s intention of redeeming fallen man was first signified in heaven before it was signified on earth because the business of the angels as the ministering spirits of the mediator required it.”\footnote{Edwards, “Sermon Two,” in \textit{WJE}, 9:132.} Stout observes, “In other sermons delivered in this period, ontological issues of creation and being were subordinated to the dramatic narrative of the fall, when heaven, earth, and hell intersected with one another and with the orchestrating Trinity.”\footnote{Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in \textit{WJE}, 22:18.} Delivered in November 1740, a sermon entitled, “They Sing a New Song,” Edwards reiterates a non-familiar theme:

This work of God is more wonderful and more glorious by far than anything that Adam in innocency had to praise God. Yea, this is the most glorious subject that the angels in heaven themselves have for their songs. They once sang praises to God for the work of creation. . . . But now, since they have seen the work of redemption, these morning stars sing a new song, the work of redemption is principally the subject of their praises.\footnote{Edwards, “They Sing a New Song,” in \textit{WJE}, 22:235.}

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\footnote{Stout, “Preface to the Period,” in \textit{WJE}, 22:18.}


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\footnote{Edwards, “They Sing a New Song,” in \textit{WJE}, 22:235.}
Edwards’ history of the earth was divided into three specific eras: from the fall of humankind to the incarnation of Christ, the God-man; from the incarnation to the bodily resurrection of Christ; and from the resurrection to the end of time. Though brief, the vital juncture of interaction between heaven, earth, and hell came during the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the incarnation of Christ, the minions of hell trembled even as the response in heaven was anything but static: “This appears by their joyful songs on this occasion, heard by the shepherds in the night. This was the greatest event of providence that ever the angels beheld.”\textsuperscript{95} After the resurrection,

Christ entered into heaven in order to the obtaining the success of his purchase. . . . And as he ascended into heaven, God the Father did in a visible manner set him on the throne as king of the universe. He then put the angels all under him, and he subjected heaven and earth under him, that he might govern them for the good of the people that he had died for.\textsuperscript{96}

\textbf{Hell}

No less detail is provided by Edwards regarding the history of hell. The religious culture and art during the seventeenth and eighteenth century reflected a strong fascination with the subject of hell.\textsuperscript{97} The theme of hell formed a central component in Edwards’ narrative on redemption. Subsequent to the creation of the world, “evil entered into the world in the fall of the angels and man. . . . Satan rose up against God, endeavoring to frustrate his design in the creation of this lower world.”\textsuperscript{98} The rebellion of Satan introduced the narrative of hell—a place as real and palpable as heaven and earth.

\textsuperscript{95} Edwards, “No. 5: Sermon Fourteen,” in \textit{WJE}, 9:301.


The kingdom of Satan was hell, an abode void of goodness or God; a place of suffering and physical pain. Edwards wrote, “Hell is represented by fire and brimstone. . . . Lighting is a stream of brimstone; and if that stream of brimstone which we are told kindles hell be as hot as streams of lightning, it will be vehement beyond conception.” For Edwards, hell was a place of utter torment where no inhabitant had a second chance to escape after death. Hell was eternal and irreversible.

Similar to the history of heaven, the history of hell is intimately intertwined to the history of earth and proves necessary in an engagement with the drama of redemption. Written a few years prior to the excommunication sermon, Edwards notes in Miscellanies 702 that “God hath so ordered it that all the great concerns and events of the universe should be some way concerning of this work [of redemption], that the occasion of the fall of some of the angels should be something about this.” Redemption, he continued, was “why the fall of man was so soon permitted.” When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, Edwards observed, “Hell was as much and much more engaged [than Egypt]. The pride and cruelty of Satan, that old serpent, was more concerned in it than Pharaoh’s.” For Edwards, with their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, Israel enjoyed a victory as much over hell as over Egypt.

After Egypt, Edwards traced the formation of other “blasphemous nations.” He recognized four great earthly kingdoms: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Edwards pointed to Satan whom he believed was working behind and within each of these historic kingdoms. In Rome, the mightiest empire, “Satan’s visible kingdom was raised to its

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greatest height,” both during the time of Christ’s incarnation and in the future with the reign of “Antichrist,” the papacy. While Christ lived upon the earth as the God-man, the spiritual battle of the cosmos became earth-centered. It was not long after Christ inaugurated his public ministry that he was led into the wilderness by the devil. In this barren wilderness, “Satan made a violent onset upon him in his first entrance on his work, and now he made a remarkable trail of his obedience.” However, at the conclusion of the temptation, Christ “got the victory.” According to Edwards, the resurrection of Christ marked the final death-blow of Satan:

Satan who lately was so ready to triumph and insult, as though he had got the victory in killing Christ, now finding himself fallen into the pit that he had digged, and finding his kingdom falling so fast, and seeing Christ’s kingdom make such amazing progress such as never had been before, we may conclude he was filled with the greatest confusion and astonishment, and hell seemed to be effectually alarmed by it to make the most violent opposition against it.

At the end of earth’s history with the climatic battles between the righteous, Antichrist, and Satan, all three worlds—heaven, earth, and hell—collide together, positioning heaven as the preeminent performer in the conflict: “At the day of judgment, the Sun of righteousness shall appear in its greatest glory; Christ shall then come in the glory of the Father, and all the holy angels with him.” Edwards cautioned in his sermon, “Christ the Spiritual Sun,” that the devastation that accompanies this final day would exceed the persecutions suffered by the Jews after the death and resurrection of Christ, in AD 70. Edwards declared,

[Christ] brought the amazing destruction of the unbelieving Jews, terribly destroying their city and country by the Romans. So when he will come in a spiritual sense at the beginning of the expected glorious times of the church, he will come [not only]

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for the deliverance and healing and rejoicing of his church, but for the amazing
destruction of Antichrist and other enemies of his church.  

With the overthrowing of the Antichrist, the earthly kingdoms of Satan would be utterly eradicated. Satan would be expelled from earth as he formerly was from heaven:

And now the devil . . . shall receive his full punishment . . . This world that formerly used to be the place of his kingdom, where he set up himself as God, shall now be the place of his complete punishment, and full and everlasting torment. . . . [In] Christ the Spiritual Sun, the world shall literally be a fire and shall be all like an oven, filled with the flames of the fiercest and most glowing heat.

A “new heavens” and “new earth” would be created. From his miscellaneous entries it becomes evident that Edwards believed the new heavens and the new earth would be firmly established in the realm heaven: “The new heavens and new earth, so far as a place of habitation is meant by ‘em, are heaven and not this lower world.” While the old heaven was considered corruptible because of the fall of Satan, the new heaven would be incorruptibly a paradise with no end. At the second coming of Christ, the saints residing in heaven and those remaining on the earth would, according to Edwards, witness glories previously unknown, even in heaven. The intellect of the human mind will be of such capabilities that they will see universes inside a single atom. Edwards writes, “‘Tis only for want of sufficient accurateness, strength and comprehension of mind, that from the motion of any one particular atom we can’t tell all that ever has been, [all] that now is in the whole extent of creation . . . and everything that ever shall be.”

In a corollary to this point, Edwards concludes, “What room for improvement of reason is there [in heaven], for angels and glorified minds!”

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Christ: The King of Angels

Jonathan Edwards developed his Christology from his dominant interest in the history of the work of redemption. While he never composed a treatise on Christology, the shape of his thinking regarding the nature and roles of the Son of God can be sketched from both his apologetic work and his systematic accounts of the history of redemption.\(^\text{114}\) Edwards was Trinitarian in his Christology because his thinking about the Son of God developed from his vision of redemption, which started with the Trinity. In his “Blank Bible,” he wrote, “The Logos of God is his glory, the brightness of his glory.”\(^\text{115}\) In a sermon, he proclaimed, “God the Father is an infinite fountain of light, but Jesus Christ is the communication of this light.”\(^\text{116}\) He said the Father can be compared to the sun, and Jesus Christ “to the light that streams forth from him by which the world is enlightened.”\(^\text{117}\) Christ’s supreme work is to glorify God:

Jesus Christ has this honor, to be the greatest instrument of glorifying God that ever was, and more than all other beings put together. Yea, he is so the great means or author of the glory of God, that what others do towards it is in dependence upon what he does; the actions of others are to God’s glory through him.\(^\text{118}\)

According to Edwards, Christ accomplishes this prodigious work by revealing God to humanity, whose involvement in God’s love and joy constitutes redemption.

The covenant of redemption, according to Edwards, was an agreement between the Father and the Son that the Triune God would redeem fallen humanity; there was also agreement on the means of redemption. The Father determined “to allow a redemption, and for whom it shall be. He pitches upon a Redeemer. He proposes . . . precisely what he

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\(^{117}\) Edwards, “Christ, the Light of the World,” in WJE, 10:535.

\(^{118}\) Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 526,” in WJE, 18:70.
should do as the terms of man’s redemption, and all the work that he should perform in this affair, and the reward he should receive.”

Although the Father was “the first mover” in this covenant, the Son acted “wholly in his own right, as much as the Father.”

Redemption was planned, not primarily for the sake of the redeemed, but for the Son and his glory. “God’s end” in the creation “was to procure a spouse, or a mystical body, for his Son . . . for the adequate displays of his unspeakable and transcendent goodness and grace.” Each member of the elect church was chosen for the sake of being in that mystical body that would glorify the Son. Just as “God chose every particle of inanimate matter” in the “body of man . . . not . . . as a single, separate particle, but no otherwise than in that living body,” so too “particular elect persons” are chosen “singly” but only in “respect to their union in the body of Christ.” For God’s “special aim in all was to procure one created child” through the union of believers with his son. Therefore, in Stephen R. Holmes’ words, “The election of Christ is first; the election of His spouse, or body, next and the election of the members of that body only third.”


120 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 1062,” in WJE, 20:436. The covenant of redemption was a familiar topic in Puritan theology. It was developed by the German and Dutch (respectively) theologians Kaspar Olevianus (1536–1587) and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), and became the foundation for the work of redemption detailed by van Mastricht, Edwards’ favorite theologian. Adriaan C. Neele, Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706) (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 262.


The world was created because of these acts of election, and Jesus Christ was chosen to be principal agent of that creation. This same theology of creation was espoused by John Calvin and the orthodox Reformed divines, but Edwards put more emphasis on the “aim” of the creation being the work of redemption. Therefore, since Christ “was to be the great means of God’s glory” by “that great work of Christ as mediator,” it was “meet” [fitting] that he should take the principal role in creating the world. Since he was to do the “principal work” in redemption, and both the beginning and end of the world are “subordinat[ed]” to the work of redemption, it was fitting that he should be the creature at the beginning and the judge at the end. In the creation of the first human beings, his “particular and distinct” role was to “endue man with understanding and reason,” while the Spirit imparted a “holy will and inclination, with original righteousness.” Jesus Christ filled the earth with “emanations, or shadows” of his own excellencies.

So that when we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consider that we only see the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ; when we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see his love and purity. . . . There are also many things wherein we may behold his awful majesty: in the sun in his strength, in comets, in thunder, in the towering thunder clouds, in ragged rocks and the brows of mountains.

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This beautiful world, full of the emanations of Jesus Christ, was created so that he could come into it “to fulfill and answer the covenant of works.”\textsuperscript{131} This is “what the Apostle calls ‘the law of works,’ Romans 3:27.”\textsuperscript{132} It includes “all the laws of God ever given to mankind,” which include “the law of nature [the Ten Commandments] and political commands,” obedience to parents, and particular religious commands given to Adam, Jews, and Christ himself.\textsuperscript{133} The commands that Christ obeyed “may be distributed into three particular laws,” namely the moral law, the ceremonial law (all the laws that pertained to him as a Jew), and the “mediatorial law,” such as the commands from the Father “to work such miracles, and teach such doctrines, and so to labor in the works of his public ministry, and to yield himself to such sufferings” as the Father prescribed.\textsuperscript{134} Since the first Adam failed to fulfill the covenant of works by disobeying “that special law [not to eat from one tree in the garden] that he was subject to as a moral head and surety,” Christ as the last Adam had to obey the “special law that he was subject to, in his office of mediator and surety”—the mediatorial law.\textsuperscript{135} This law was “infinitely more difficult” to obey than the other two, and therefore “most meritorious.”\textsuperscript{136} The result was that Christ fulfilled “the covenant that we had broken, and that was the covenant that must be fulfilled,” the covenant of works.\textsuperscript{137}


Angels

The reflections of Jonathan Edwards on angels and demons repeated much of the traditional orthodoxy. The angels were created by God and are bodiless or incorporeal beings. They are intelligent beings who are spectators to God’s work in the universe from the moment of their creation up to the present time. They are moral beings with a capacity to choose both good and evil. They exist in vast numbers and have powers that greatly exceed those of human beings. Some angels fell through sin or disobedience, and these fallen angels are the demons. Satan was once the foremost of the unfallen angels and, after his fall, became the leader and foremost of the demons. The unfallen angels serve as ministers of God’s providence, performing many functions throughout the physical universe and in the lives of human beings.

Yet, there are several points at which Edwards’ account of the angels differs from that of his predecessors. Based on his interpretations and of inferences from Scripture, Edwards concluded that the angels were not confirmed in grace until long after the world’s creation. In fact, the unfallen angels were unconfirmed in grace and on probation from their creation until the ascension of Christ—truly an inconceivably long period of time as compared with Aquinas’ notion of an instantaneous fall from grace (for the fallen angels) and an equally instantaneous confirmation in grace (for the unfallen angels). Moreover, Edwards’ angels were capable of growing in grace and blessedness—a quality that makes them human-like. Unlike the heavenly figures of perfect blessedness that one finds in Aquinas’ account, Edwards’ angels were directly involved, invested, and interested in human events and affairs. They themselves—even in their unfallen state—were reconciled to God when the Son of God took on a creature’s nature in the Incarnation. This is one reason that angels rejoiced at Jesus’ birth. In eternity, angels and humans will together make a single holy community in heaven. Edwards did not present the entire story of angels in a single text, but repeatedly returned to the same themes in his Miscellanies, and it is from there that one can piece together an interconnected narrative. The story, as Edwards tells it, sweeps from creation through all of history to consummation.
God created the angels to be "fit witnesses and spectators of God’s works here below." The problem is that human beings "see but a very little . . . and they don’t live long enough to see more than a very small part of the scheme." For this reason, “God saw fit that there should be creatures of very great discerning and comprehensive understandings” to be “spectators of the whole series of the works of God.” The angels were created “in the beginning of creation” so that they could see all that transpired “from the beginning to the consummation of all things.” Edwards cites the text in Job 38:7, which speaks of the “sons of God”—taken as a reference to angels—shouting for joy when God laid the foundations of the earth.

Given the high stature of the angels, possessing “more excellent natural powers” than human beings, it might seem “a very improper thing that saints in some respects should be advanced above angels.” Yet Edwards reasons that this is no more improper than that a “queen” of a kingdom should be advanced above “nobles and barons, of far nobler natural powers.” The argument here presupposes Edwards’ nuptial or bridal theology. The church, as the bride of Christ, receives its stature wholly from its relationship with Jesus Christ—the bridegroom. It is a derived rather than inherent standing. Edwards assigns momentous significance to the church’s status as the Bride of Christ, for he writes that “this spouse of the Son of God, the bride . . . is that for which all the universe was

made. Heaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse."\(^{145}\)

The ultimate purpose of God in creating the world, for Edwards, was linked with the Incarnation of the Son of God—the joining of the eternal Son with a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Despite a focus on the sufferings and the crucifixion of Christ, Edwards’ reflections on God’s purposes began with the Incarnation: “It seems to me very proper and suitable, that the human nature should be advanced far above the angelical nature by the incarnation of Christ.”\(^{146}\) The reason for this is that “men are a more ultimate end of the creation than the angels,” and “the angels . . . are created for this end, to minister to the creatures.”\(^{147}\) There is a parallel between Christ and the angels at this point. Christ’s divine nature places him inherently higher than all human beings, and yet Christ humbles himself to serve humanity in his earthly life. The angels are also inherently above human beings (though not so high as Christ), yet the angels are called to serve those lower than themselves. In other passages, Edwards develops this idea further with regard to the church’s ministers and eminent saints, who show their excellence by embracing a position of lowliness and servitude.

The angels, for Edwards, were limited beings with only a partial grasp of God’s purposes. Based on his exegesis of certain key biblical texts (esp. Eph. 3:9-11; Col. 1:26; 1 Cor 2:7-9), Edwards concluded that God’s sweeping plan for cosmic redemption was “a secret that [God] kept within himself, was hid and sealed up in the divine understanding, and never had as yet been divulged to any other.”\(^{148}\) This means that the angels—though witnessing God’s works in history from the beginning of creation—were not able to


understand all the intricacies of God’s redemptive plan. And this is where the problem began. Some angels did not—or would not—understand, accept, and embrace God’s plan.

Between 1729 and 1733, a number of Edwards’ sermons focused on Christ. Beginning with an emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation and Christ’s humility during his earthly life, Edwards shifted later to focus on Christ’s heavenly glory as a “reward” for his earthly sufferings. He particularly focused on Christ’s “enthronization” at the time of his ascension into heaven.\(^{149}\) Edwards reasoned that Christ at the conclusion of his earthly life and sufferings, was “worthy . . . to receive” (Rev 5:12) all power, glory, and blessing from the Father. During these years, Edwards developed what has been called “enthronement theology,” centering on Christ’s ascension—one of his truly distinctive theological motifs.\(^{150}\) At the time of his ascension, Christ became the “head of angels,” for “the angels were not unconcerned in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ.”\(^{151}\) As he wrote, the angels “have this benefit by the incarnation of Christ that thereby God is become a creature, and so is nearer to them.”\(^{152}\) For this reason, angels and humans are “of the same family.”\(^{153}\) In constructing Christ’s cosmic story, Edwards gave more attention to the ascension of Christ than to the resurrection per se. Of course, Edwards did

\(^{149}\) See the following sermons—listed with text, doctrine, and approximate dates of delivery: Canticles (Song of Songs) 8:1, “The incarnation of Jesus Christ was a thing greatly longed for by the church,” summer–fall 1729; Job 33:6-7, “Tis a most desirable thing in our circumstances, to have a Mediator between God and us in our own nature, one that is flesh, that is formed out of the clay as we are,” fall 1730–spring 1731; Isa 53:10, “That Christ should see sinners converted and saved, was part of the reward that God promised him for his sufferings,” August 1731–December 1732; Rev 5:12, “Christ was worthy of his exaltation upon the account of his being slain,” August 1731–December 1732; Ps 110:2, “Christ will rule in the midst of his enemies,” May 1733. See also Jonathan Edwards, “Section Title,” in WJE, vol. 15, Notes on Scripture, ed. Stephen J. Stein (1998), 298-302, for a detailed typological interpretation of David’s brining of the ark to Jerusalem as a picture of Christ’s ascension.


not believe Christ’s story found its ultimate culmination until his second advent to subdue his enemies and to reign in their midst. Edwards referred to this as a “second ascension”—an event even more majestic than the first ascension—when, at the end of his history, Christ with his glorified saints will rise from earth into heaven to establish his reign in the new heavens and new earth. After the judgement of the wicked, Edwards writes,

Christ and all his church of saints and all the holy angels ministering to them shall leave this lower world and ascend up towards the highest heavens. Christ shall ascend in as great glory as he descended, and in some respects greater, for now he shall ascend with all his elect church, with him glorified in both body and soul. Christ's first ascension to heaven soon after his own resurrection was very glorious. But this, his second ascension of his mystical body, his whole church, shall be far more glorious. The redeemed church shall all ascend with him in a most joyful and triumphant manner. And all their enemies and persecutors that shall be left behind on the cursed ground to be consumed, shall see the sight and hear their songs. And thus Christ's church shall forever leave this accursed world to go into that more glorious world, the highest heavens, into the paradise of God, the kingdom that was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.154

The narrative of Christ’s exaltation begins with humiliation. Suffering, Edwards said, was prerequisite to any reward for Christ: “‘Tis fit . . . that every creature, before he receives the eternal reward of his obedience, should have some considerable trial of his obedience.”155 For “respect to God’s authority” is only established through the overcoming of a trial. Even Christ, who is the most supreme existence in the cosmos, had to be the most greatly tested by God in respect of his obedience. Edwards states, “It is an honor that the holy angels have never had, to obey God in and by suffering. Herein the people of Jesus Christ, as well as Christ himself, have a higher honor in some respects than the angels.”156 In terms reminiscent of the early Christian theme of Christus Victor, Edwards writes, “Christ poured the greater contempt upon Satan in his victory over him, by reason of the

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manner of his preparing himself to fight with him, and the contemptible means and weapons he made use of.”¹⁵⁷ He defeated him by preparing to encounter that proud and potent enemy, the method he took was not to put on his strength and to deck himself with glory and beauty, but to lay aside his strength and glory and to become weak, to take upon him the nature of a poor, feeble, mortal man, a worm of the dust, that in this nature and state he might overcome Satan; like David who, when he went to fight with Goliath, put off the princely armor that Saul armed him with.¹⁵⁸

Edwards further describes the weapons used by Christ in this defeat of the devil:

The weapons that Christ made use of in fighting with the hellish giant were his poverty, afflictions, reproaches, and death. His principal weapon was his own cross, the ignominious instrument of his own death. These were seemingly weak and despicable weapons, and doubtless Satan disdained ‘em, as much as Goliath did David's stones that he came out against him with. But with such weapons as these, Christ in a human, weak, mortal nature overthrew all the power and baffled all the craft of hell.¹⁵⁹

For Edwards, the turning point in Christ’s story was his ascension, which was “the solemn day of his investiture with the glory of his kingdom . . . an occasion of great rejoicing in the whole church in heaven and earth.”¹⁶⁰ Edwards spoke of “the happy effects of Christ’s enthronization.”¹⁶¹ In some sense, this “enthronization” at the ascension was a renewal of what had already taken place at creation: “At Christ’s first enthronization after the creation, Christ was set over the angels, as he was at the second after the new creation.”¹⁶² At Christ’s exaltation, the Father declares, “let all the angels of God worship him” (Heb 1:6). For “it was very congruous that Christ should have this honor


immediately, after such great humiliation and sufferings.” If it was fitting that Christ should be publicly rewarded after his sufferings; it was no less fitting and suitable that the angels should be rewarded at the same time. For Christ’s trial and suffering were equally a trial to the angels who beheld it happening: “It was fit that the angels should be confirmed after they had seen Christ in the flesh, for this was the greatest trial of the angels’ obedience that ever was.” In particular, the sight of him as “a poor, obscure, despised, afflicted man” was a trial to them. Previously many angels had fallen at the mere announcement that this was to happen. Now it had occurred. This was a great trial to those thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. . . . [So] it was very fit that God should honor the day of the ascension and glorious exaltation of his Son, which was a day of such joy to Christ, with joining with it such an occasion of joy to the angels, as the reception of their reward of eternal life.

It sounds here almost as though the unfallen angels were receiving salvation because at this point they received “their reward of eternal life.” Once again, Edwards sees the angelic relationship to God as analogous to the human.

Edwards considered the objection that the trial of the angels’ obedience from the beginning of the world until the ascension of Christ may have lasted too long. Yet perhaps for “those mighty spirits” it was fitting that the trial should last much longer than it did for human beings. Edwards admitted that the unfallen angels were not absolutely certain that they would not fall as Lucifer had until the time that they were confirmed.

167 See Ava Chamberlain’s comments on the analogies between humans and angels in Ava Chamberlain, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE, 18:20-23.
Yet, once Christ accomplished his work on earth, it was suitable that there should be a single community of humans and angels in a confirmed condition of beatitude:

Christ, since he appeared in the flesh, gathered together and united into one society, one family, one body, all the angels and saints in heaven and the church on earth. Now 'tis not to be supposed that part of this body are in a confirmed state, and part still in a state of probation. . . . [At the ascension] Christ is the head of the angels, and . . . the angels are united to him as part of his body.169

This means that Christ is not only “their head of government . . . he is the head from whence they derive their good.”170

The angels receive great benefit from Christ, and the sheer fact that the Son of God took on a creature nature—even a human one—is of great importance to the angels as fellow creatures:

And the angels enjoy very glorious benefits by Christ’s incarnation; ‘tis a glorious benefit to all creatures that love God, that God is become a creature. . . . The angels and saints make up but one family, through members of a different character; as in one royal house there is the queen, the children, the barons, etc. He is the head of all the rational creation; saints and angels are united in Christ, and have communion in him.171

In describing the heavenly assembly of the glorified saints and the unfallen angels, Edwards emphasizes that they are spectators of God’s works—as becomes clear in the Book of Revelation: “When God gradually carries on the designs of grace in this world, by accomplishing glorious things in the church below, there is a new accession of joy and glory to the church in heaven. Thus the matter is represented in John’s Revelations.”172

One might even say that the angels undergo “reconciliation” to God through the person and work of Christ, and this helps to explain their joy and exuberance at Christ’s birth:


When the angels rejoiced so much at the birth of Christ, they did not merely rejoice in the happiness of another that they were no wise partakers in, but doubtless saw glorious things that accrued to them by it. They desire to look into those things, admiring at the bounty of God to them as well as to us, in coming so near to them as to become a rational creature like themselves. Yea, there is a kind of reconciliation, that is procured thereby for the angels by Christ’s incarnation: for though there never was an alienation, yet there is a great distance between a God of infinite majesty and them; which would in some measure forbid that infinite enjoyment, and familiar fellowship, which so great love desires. But by God’s thus coming down to the creature, everything is entirely reconciled to the natural propensity of most dear love.  

What Edwards describes here is a kind of metaphysical reconciliation of the unfallen angels to God—though not a moral one involving guilt and forgiveness. Because of God’s drawing near to the creature in the incarnation, both humans and angels are drawn near to God in most dear love.

Initially, Edwards believes perseverance was an essential prerequisite for the confirmation of the angels. He seems to postpone this confirmation until the ascension of Christ back into heaven after his death and resurrection. According to Edwards, God reserved the angels in a “state of trial,” from the time of the angelic fall until the ascension of Christ. This lengthy period of, what is considered probation, guaranteed the angels had a comprehensive trial regarding their obedience before their final confirmation.

Specifically, the angels were not confirmed until after they had viewed Christ in the flesh, for this was, Edwards believed, the greatest trial of obedience for the angels. Edwards writes of the unfallen angels’ resistance of the great temptation that resulted in the fall of Lucifer and a multitude of other angels, which is examined in the next chapter:

173 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 120,” in WJE, 13:285. Cf. WJE, 13:232-33; WJE, 13:480-81. Edwards used a number of interesting exegetical arguments to support his idea that angels and humans are “of the same family.” He pointed out that in Rev 22:9 an angel says to John that he is “of thy brethren.” Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 555,” in WJE, 18:100. Though this is only a passing reference, it is one case in Scripture where human beings and angels are spoken of together as “brethren.” On this same theme, Edwards also cites Eph 1:10, where God will “gather together in one all things in Christ,” and Col 1:20, where God will “reconcile all things unto himself . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” See too the sermon on 1 Tim 2:5, “Jesus Christ is the Great Mediator and Head of Union,” in Michael D. McMullen, ed., The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 311-26.

The fall of the angels that fell, was a great establishment and confirmation to the angels that stood. They resisted a great temptation by which the rest fell, whatever that temptation was, and they resisted the enticement of the ring leaders which drew away multitudes; and the resisting and overcoming great temptation, naturally tends greatly to confirm in righteousness. And probably they had been engaged on God's side, in resisting those that fell, when there was war, rebellion raised in heaven against God.  

This great temptation that drew Lucifer and other angels to fall created a great divide in heaven, causing some angels to be on one side and some on the other. Because of the opposition of some to the fall, these “naturally tended to confirm their friendship to God.” These unfallen angels saw the wrath of God unleashed upon those who rebelled and through this learned more highly to prize God’s favor, by seeing the dreadfulness of his displeasure; they now saw more of the beauty of holiness, now they had the deformity of sin to compare it with. . . . 

He employs some speculative language in writing that it looked “exceeding probable” to him, “that whenever this was done (the confirmation of the unfallen angels), it was through the Son of God; that he was the immediate dispenser of this reward, and that they received it of the Father through him.” Edwards continues to flesh out his argument by pointing to the ascension of Christ as the time of the confirmation of all unfallen angels. In addition, he gives five reasons as to why he views this as the period of their confirmation:

1. It was Jesus Christ in the human nature that was despised and rejected by the rebelling angels; it was congruous therefore, that it should be Jesus Christ in the human nature that should confirm them that stood.

2. It was also congruous that their confirmation should be deferred till that time; that before they were confirmed, they might have a thorough trial of their obedience in that particular wherein the rebelling angels were guilty, viz. in their submission to Jesus Christ in the human nature. It was congruous therefore, that their confirmation should be deferred, till they had actually submitted to Christ in man's nature as their

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King; as they had opportunity to do when Christ in man's nature ascended into heaven. And,

3. It seems very congruous that this should be reserved to be part of Christ's exaltation. We often read of Christ's being set over the angels, when he ascended and sat at the right hand [of God]; and that then he was made head of all principality and power, that then all things were put under his feet, that then God the Father said, "Let all the angels of God worship him" [Hebrews 1:6]. It was very congruous that Christ should have this honor immediately, after such great humiliation and sufferings. And,

4. It was fit that the angels should be confirmed after they had seen Christ in the flesh, for this was the greatest trial of the angels' obedience that ever was. If the other angels rebelled only at its being foretold that such an one in man's nature should rule over them, if that was so great a trial that so many angels fell in it; how great a trial was [it] when they saw a poor, obscure, despised, afflicted man, and when they had just seen [him] so mocked and spit upon, and crucified and put to death, like a vile malefactor! This was a great trial to those thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, those mighty glorious and exalted spirits, whether or no they would submit to such an one for their sovereign Lord and King.

5. It was very fit that God should honor the day of the ascension and glorious exaltation of his Son, which was a day of such joy to Christ, with joining with it such an occasion of joy to the angels, as the reception of their reward of eternal life; that when Christ rejoices, who had lately endured so much sorrow, the heavenly hosts might rejoice with him.

6. The angels are now confirmed, and hence have been since Christ's ascension; for Christ, since he appeared in the flesh, gathered together and united into one society, one family, one body, all the angels and saints in heaven and the church on earth. Now 'tis not to be supposed that part of this body are in a confirmed state, and part still in a state of probation.179

This work of confirmation is undoubtedly accomplished by Christ. Edwards notes, “We learn by Scripture: that Christ is the head of the angels, and that the angels are united to him as part of his body. Which holds forth, that he is not only their head of government, but their head of communication; he is the head from whence they derive their good.”180

Edwards raises some objections to the suggestion that the angels were kept until the ascension of Christ before they were confirmed. The first objection he raises is the length of time from the period of the angelic rebellion until the ascension of Christ.


His answer suggests that this length of time was in fact a trial the angels were forced to endure.\textsuperscript{181} Second, building on the length of time, Edwards raises the objection that the angels could not enjoy that quiet and undisturbed happiness for all that while, if they were all the time unconfirmed, and did not certainly know that they should not fall. . . . There was no occasion for any disresting fears. For they never could be guilty of rebellion without knowing, when they were going to commit it, that it was rebellion, and that thereby they should forfeit eternal life and expose themselves to wrath, by the tenor of God's covenant. And they could not fall, but it must be their voluntary act; and they had perfect freedom of mind from any lust, and had been sufficiently warned and greatly confirmed when the angels fell: so that there was a great probability that they should not fall, though God had not yet declared and promised absolutely that they should not. They were not absolutely certain of it; this was an occasion of joy reserved for that joyful and glorious day of Christ's ascension.\textsuperscript{182}

Edwards suggests that the unfallen angels, from the angelic rebellion until the ascension of Christ, were in trial and unconfirmed for eternal joy. In fact, they were not certain that they would not too fall like their fellow creatures had done at the insurrection of Lucifer and his minions. This trial of uncertainty was the “occasion of joy” that God “reserved” for that “glorious day of Christ’s ascension.”\textsuperscript{183} Here is another aspect of glory and joy reserved for Christ at his enthronement at the time of the ascension; namely, the confirmation of the angels, who would rejoice greatly that they were confirmed for eternal joy in the presence of God and their King, Jesus Christ.

Offering pastoral application of this theological truth, Edwards recognizes that God has been gracious toward angels and men in Christ being “the tree of life in the heavenly paradise,” who is also the tree “to all the inhabitants of that paradise.”\textsuperscript{184} In addition, Edwards highlights the manifold wisdom of God who demonstrates that the “dispensations of providence in Christ’s incarnation, death, and exaltation” are the means


\textsuperscript{182} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 515,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:60.

\textsuperscript{183} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 515,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:60.

through which glorious and wonderful ends “are accomplished by the same events in
heaven, earth, and hell.” Edwards pulls that single thread of redemptive history
showing how God’s wisdom and works accomplish marvelous wonders in that tri-world
narrative of which he is so interested. Edwards also demonstrates how “the affairs of the
church on earth and of the blessed assembly of heaven are linked together.” He writes,

When the joyful times of the gospel begin on earth, which begin with Christ's exaltation, then joyful times begin also in heaven amongst the angels there, and by the same means. When we have such a glorious occasion given us to rejoice, they have an occasion given them. So long as the church continued under a legal dispensation, so long the angels continued under law; for since their confirmation, the angels are not under law, as is evident by what I have said in my note on Galatians 5:18. So doubtless at the same time, there was a great addition to the happiness of the separate spirits of the saints, as the resurrection of many of them with Christ's resurrection is an argument. And in the general, when God gradually carries on the designs of grace in this world, by accomplishing glorious things in the church below, there is a new accession of joy and glory to the church in heaven.

Affirming this with Scripture, Edwards points to Colossians 1:16-20, “that it was the design of the Father that his Son should have the preeminence in all things, not only with respect to men, but with respect to angels, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers.” He argues from these verses that if Christ has the preeminence with respect to angels, that he created them, that they consist by him, that he is the dispenser of God’s benefits to them, that they have all fullness in him, then why should he also not be the one to give them eternal life? It is God’s will, Edwards writes, that the Son “in all things should have preeminence, and that all fullness should dwell in him,” and therefore,

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188 Edwards, in WJE, 18:61.
189 Edwards, in WJE, 18:106.
“by him he reconciles all things to him[self], whether they be things in heaven or things on earth.” If this preeminence extends to the world of men, Edwards argues that it also extends to the world of angels: “By him the angels also are brought to their confirmed union with him.” It was the design of the Father that Christ should in “all things” dwell in preeminence, in respect to both angels as well as humanity, and that angels and humans should possess their fullness only in him. Therefore, if men have their fullness in Christ, Edwards states, “I don’t see how it can be otherwise, than they should have their reward and eternal life and blessedness in him.” Another text employed by Edwards is 1 Corinthians 8:6, which says that all things are of God the Father, and all things by Jesus Christ. He writes,

God gave the angels their being by Jesus Christ; and I don’t see why this would not be another instance of all things being by him, that he gives them their eternal life by Jesus Christ. This is one instance of men’s being by him, and is intended in those words that follow, “and we by him.”

God gives to his Son all things and over all things the Son has preeminence, including both angels and men, granting eternal life.

The angels were judged and rewarded at the ascension of Christ. However, they do not arrive at their full reward until after the day of judgment, “as the devils don’t on their punishment, and as the saints don’t receive their complete reward on their first being with their ascended Savior and with the angels.” Edwards argues that all who are in Christ are in a confirmed state of holiness and happiness, which first began at his ascension and extends to the present. Edwards writes, “The saints, when they first go to be with Christ in glory, are then judged; and their reward is adjudged to them and

bestowed upon them in degree, as it was with the angels at Christ’s ascension,” but, Edwards points out, “they shall be judged again and more fully rewarded at the day of judgment, and so it shall be also with the angels.”¹⁹⁵ The final day of the judgment of God will be universal for all men, angels, and devils. Regarding the saints, Edwards says that they will be judged again at that final tribunal “not because their state is not already determined, but to make God’s righteousness in their justification manifest before the whole universe convened, and for their more public honor,” he adds the same is true for the unfallen angels.¹⁹⁶ Edwards describes that day in great detail:

That great day will be a doleful day to both wicked men and devils, because it will be the day of their condemnation and entrance on their utmost misery. But it will be a joyful day to both saints and angels, because it will be the day of their open justification, and of Christ's public acknowledgment and approbation of them and manifestation of his great esteem of them and love to them, and the day of the bestowment of their consummate happiness, and their entrance on their last and most perfect and glorious state. It will be the day of the consummation of all things pertaining to all rational creatures, men, angels and devils. It will be the wedding day of the church; then will be the marriage of the Lamb. It will be the great day of the reward of both saints and angels, and indeed of all elect persons, even of Jesus Christ God-man, Mediator, himself. It will be the day of his highest exaltation, or greatest manifestation of his exaltation, which exaltation is the reward of his righteousness. It will be the day when Christ himself will be most openly and publicly and remarkably justified. He is said to be justified when God raised him from the dead. God the Father then gave an open testimony of his approbation of what he had done. But how much more will God's setting of him to be the universal judge of heaven, earth and hell be a testimony of his approbation, and an open justification of him. Then did God put great honor on his Son when he ascended into heaven. But he will put much greater honor on him, when he shall descend from heaven in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels with him.¹⁹⁷

Edwards paints a portrait of this day as one of both celebration and lament. Celebration for those who in Christ and lament for those in rebellion against him. The reason saints and angels will appear before the final seat of judgment, Edwards explains, is to make an open show before the assembled cosmos of the glory of Christ in them as


the ones rescued by his love and grace and now “his joy and crown.”\textsuperscript{198} This day “will be a day wherein Christ and his saints and angles rejoice together in a most glorious [manner]; and from henceforth will they rejoice together in their most consummate joy, before the Father, forever.”\textsuperscript{199}


CHAPTER 6
THE ANGELIC FALL AND JONATHAN EDWARDS

Lucifer was the chief of all the angels, of greatest natural capacity, strength and wisdom, and highest in honor and dignity, the brightest of all those stars.¹

Jonathan Edwards

The Puritans regarded the devil and his minions as angels who were created by God but fell into sin and misery.² William Gouge (1575–1653) wrote, “The devils by creation were good angels, as powerful, wise, quick, speedy, invisible, and immortal as any other angels.”³ The Puritans believed that demons shared the same nature as angels, but through rebellion against God became subject to divine judgment. When these angels fell, said Gouge, “They lost not their natural substance, and essential properties thereof, no more than what man lost when he fell. . . . Only the quality of his nature and properties


is altered from good to evil.”"⁴ The angelic attributes of the fallen spirits now work for evil rather than good.⁵

The Westminster Larger Catechism says, “God by his providence permitted some of the angels, willfully and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation, limiting and ordering that, and all their sins, to his own glory” (Q. 19).⁶ Since Christ, the only Mediator, did not take the nature of angels (Heb 2:16), Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734) said, “Their condition was irretrievable, and their misery eternal.”⁷

The Puritans viewed the history of humanity as one of repeated war with fallen spiritual powers. The Larger Catechism says that men “fell” through the temptation of Satan” (Q. 21).⁸ The fall brought man into the misery of being “bond slaves to Satan” (Q. 27).⁹ Christ’s humiliation was a state of conflict with the temptations of Satan (Q. 48).¹⁰ These invisible spiritual enemies were limited in power, according to Edward Reynolds (1599–1676), who wrote, “Satan hath three titles given him in the Scripture, setting forth his malignity against the church of God: a dragon, to denote his malice (Rev 12:3); a serpent, to denote his subtlety (Gen 3:1); and a lion, to denote strength (1 Peter 5:8).”¹¹ Jonathan Edwards said the devil’s remarkable knowledge of God, creation, and providence was due to his having been “educated in the best divinity school in the universe, viz. the

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⁵ Gouge, The Whole-Armour of God, 40.
⁶ The Westminster Confession, 179.
⁷ Ridgley, Body of Divinity, 1:365.
⁸ The Westminster Confession, 181.
⁹ The Westminster Confession, 190.
heaven of heavens.”

Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) expounded on the hierarchy of the demonic angels as “principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies” (Eph 6:12), with the following points:

1. “Principalities.” Satan rules over the entire world and is called “the prince of this world” (John 14:30) and “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). “God in justice gave Satan leave to prevail and rule in the sons of disobedience.”

2. “Powers.” Demons are “filled with a mighty power.” They can control natural forces such as lightning and wind (Job 1:16, 19), the bodies of animals (Matt 8:32), even men (Matt 17:15). They can afflict believers with disease (Job 2:7; Luke 13:16). They can act upon the “fancies” or imaginations of men, injecting thoughts or bringing up sensual memories in the human mind, thereby stirring the affections toward “wrath, pride, covetousness, lusts.”

3. “Rulers of the darkness of this world.” Ambrose designated Satan’s dominion in term of its (a) time: the age from Adam’s fall until Christ’s coming; (b) place: the earth as opposed to the heavens; and (c) subjects: those persons in darkness, the spiritual night of sin and ignorance.

4. “Spiritual wickednesses.” As spirits, demons can attack us invisibly in any place and at any time, and physical objects cannot protect us. As wicked spirits they are “evil and malicious.” The devil’s “main work is to damn souls.” And the wicked spirits not only tempt us to fleshly sins but to spiritual sins “such as unbelief, pride, hypocrisy, idolatry, blasphemy.”

William Ames (1576–1633) said the fall of man brought humanity into a state of “spiritual death,” which consists in part of man’s “bondage to the devil” (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor 4:4; John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Tim 2:26; Eph 2:2). Man is in subjection to Satan’s servants, meaning he is in “subjection to the evil incitements found in the world” (1 John 4:5; 2:15–16).

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The Larger Catechism says people by nature are “wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh and of the devil” (Q. 192). Thus, people are encouraged to plead for God’s mercy, “acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to see by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed . . . that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever” (Q. 191).

Satan’s powers are great, but for divine purposes, those powers are severely limited by God in order to do good to those who are numbered among the elect. The Puritans recognized Job as an example of this limitation. It led Thomas Ridgley to exclaim, “What would not fallen angels attempt against mankind, were not their sin limited by the providence of God!” God rules over Satan’s instruments to serve his own divine purposes, such as using Satan’s thorn in Paul’s flesh to display the sufficiency of God’s grace in polishing Paul (2 Cor 12:7-9). Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) wrote, “The goodness of God makes the devil a polisher, while he intends to be a destroyer.” The Puritans believed the wisdom of God rules over the schemes of Satan so that the devil ultimately accomplishes the plans of God. William Gurnall (1616–1679) said, “God sets the devil to catech the devil, and lays, as it were, his own counsels under Satan’s wings, and makes him hatch them.” Samuel Rutherford said that since Christ relates to all creatures as the Lord God, devils can go no place without being held by Christ on the “chain of omnipotency.” He added,


Christ numbers all the footsteps of devils. Satan hath not a general warrant to tempt the saints; but to every new act against Job (1:2; 2:6), against Peter, ere he can put him upon one single blast, to cast him but once through his sieve (Luke 22:31), yea against one sow, or bristle of sow (Matt 8:31–32), he must have a new signed commission.23

In addition, the Puritans believed all saints are embroiled in a constant battle with the devil. John Calvin warned believers about the wiles of Satan, writing, “All that Scripture teaches concerning devils aims at arousing us to take precaution against their stratagems and contrivances, and also to make us equip ourselves with those weapons which are strong and powerful enough to vanquish these most powerful foes.”24 The Puritans took this advice seriously. William Spurstowe (c. 1605–1666) warned, “Satan is full of devices, and studies arts of circumvention by which he unweariedly seeks the irrecoverable ruin of the souls of men.”25 Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) said, “Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan’s devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched.”26

In a world filled with both holy and fallen angels, the Puritans directed their hearers to Christ, whom they saw as the Lord of the hosts of heaven, and thus, the conquering Captain. John Downname (d. 1552) wrote,

If we did indeed regard our enemies’ strength and our own weakness only, we might well be discouraged from undertaking this combat, but if we look upon our grand Captain Christ, whose love towards us is no less than his power, and both infinite, there is no cause of doubting. . . . He hath already overcome our enemies. . . . Our Saviour hath spoiled principalities and powers, and hath made a show of them openly, and hath triumphed over them upon the cross (Col. 2:15).27

23 Rutherford, The Trial and Triumph of Faith, 390.


The Puritans emphasized Christ as the seed of the women who “bruised” the head of Satan (Gen 3:15) through his atoning death (Heb 2:14), his triumphant resurrection (Ps 68:18), and his final judgment (cf. Rev 20-21).

**Lucifer**

The fall of Satan and his angels, the Puritans believed, is shrouded in veil and mystery. Puritan Bible commentators understood Isaiah, Ezekiel, Luke, and Revelation as describing the fall of Lucifer (Isa 14; Ezek 28; Luke 10:18; Rev 12).

Edwards writes at length on the fall of the angels with particular attention given to the fall of the “prince of angels,” Lucifer. Edwards believed Lucifer was created to be immensely superior to all the other angels. He writes, “His vast superiority appears in his being so very often spoken of singly as the grand enemy of God and mankind, the grand adversary, accuser of the brethren, and the great destroyer.”

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29 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in *WJE*, 20:191. Edwards writes, As the devil was the highest of all the angels, so he was the very highest of all God’s creatures. He was the top and crown of the whole creation; he was the brightest part of the heaven of heavens, that brightest part of all the creation; he was the head of the angels, that most noble rank of all created beings, and therefore, when spoken of under that type of him the *Behemoth*, he is said to be “the chief of the ways of God” (Job 40:19). And since it is revealed that there is a certain order and government among the angels—the superior angels have some kind of authority over others that are of lower rank—and since Lucifer was the chief of them all, we may suppose that he was the head of the whole society, the captain of the whole host. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in *WJE*, 20:191)

30 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in *WJE*, 20:190. Edwards explains, His vast superiority appears in his being so very often spoken of singly as the grand enemy of God and mankind, the grand adversary, accuser of the brethren, and the great destroyer. He is more frequently spoken of singly in Scripture than devils are spoken of in the plural number, as though he were more than all the rest. He seems commonly in Scripture to be spoken of as *instar omnium*. It seems to be from his great superiority above all the rest that he is so often spoken of under so many peculiar names that are never found in the plural number, as Satan, Diabolos, Beelzebub, Lucifer, the dragon, the old serpent, Leviathan, the wicked one, the god of this world, the prince of this world (John 12:31), the prince of the power of the air, the accuser of the brethren, the tempter, the adversary,
the devils, or demons, are spoken of in plural language. Because of the singularity of references to Satan in Scripture, Edwards believed this is to be an argument for his superiority over all of the rest of the angels:

It seems to be from his great superiority above all the rest that he is so often spoken of under so many peculiar names that are never found in the plural number, as Satan, Diabolos, Beelzebub, Lucifer, the dragon, the old serpent, Leviathan, the wicked one, the god of this world, the prince of this world (John 12:31), the prince of the power of the air, the accuser of the brethren, the tempter, the adversary, Abaddon, Apollyon, the enemy and the avenger.31

In his superiority, Lucifer also “maintains a dominion” over them and is able to “govern and manage” them.32 Edwards employs Job 41:25, 34 as an argument that Lucifer has a type of leadership, dominion, and strength over the other angels: “All the rest of the devils are his servants, his wretched slaves; they are spoken of as his possession (Matt 25:41).”33

Prior to his fall, Lucifer, “was the chief of all the angels, of greatest natural capacity, strength and wisdom, and highest in honor and dignity, the brightest of all those stars.”34 Edwards explains,

The angels in general are called stars, signifying in part that dominion which they have whereby they are called in the New Testament thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, so as Satan was Luficer or the morning star, the brightest of all the stars, this naturally leads us to suppose that he was that creature that was set as the head of the universe, in greatest authority, as God’s prime minister of state. Christ, being of the highest authority as well as greatest glory of all, is represented in the Revelation by being called “the bright and morning star” [Revelation 22:16], so Satan’s being called the morning star represents his excelling all other creatures in authority.35

Abaddon, Apollyon, the enemy and the avenger. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in WJE, 20:191)

Edwards points to Isaiah 14:12 as an indication that Satan outshined all the other stars that were created: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” Based on his interpretation of Ezekiel 28:12-19, Edwards argues that the king of Tyrus is alluded to in Scripture as a “type of the devil” or “the prince of the angels” or “cherubim that fell.” He lists eight reasons for his interpretation:

1. Because he is here expressly called an angel or cherub once and again, Ezekiel 28:14, Ezekiel 28:16, and is spoken of as a fallen cherub.

2. He is spoken of as having been in heaven under the name of three different names, by which names heaven is often called in Scripture viz. Eden, the garden of God or the paradise of God, Ezekiel 28:13; the holy mountain of God, Ezekiel 28:14 and Ezekiel 28:16; and the sanctuary, Ezekiel 28:18.

3. He is spoken of as having been in a most happy state in the paradise of God and holy mountain of God, in great honor and beauty and pleasure.

4. He is spoken of as in his first estate, or the state wherein he was created to be perfectly free from sin, but afterwards falling by sin. Ezekiel 28:15, “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.”

5. The iniquity by which he fell was pride, or his being lifted up by reason of his superlative beauty and brightness. Ezekiel 28:17, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of the brightness.”

6. He is represented as being cast out of heaven and cast down to the earth for his sin. Ezekiel 28:16, “Therefore, I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God, and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.” Ezekiel 28:17, “I will cast thee to the ground.”

7. He is represented as being destroyed by fire here in this earthly world. Ezekiel 28:18, “I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee; it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the midst of all that behold thee.”

8. His great wisdom is spoken of as being corrupted by sin, i.e. turned into a wicked craftiness. Ezekiel 28:17, “Thou hast corrupted thy wisdom because of thy brightness.” If the king of Tyrus were not here expressly called a cherub in the paradise of God and in God's holy mountain, by which 'tis most evident that he is spoken of as a type of a cherub in the paradise of God, yet I say if it had not been so, the matter would have been very plain, for the things here spoken of can't be applied to the king of Tyrus with any beauty and without the utmost straining any other way, than as a type of the devil that was once a glorious angel in paradise. For how had the king of Tyrus in any other sense but the anointed angel in God's holy mountain and in Eden, the garden of God, and in God's sanctuary, and there being first perfect in his ways (for such a kind of expression is ever used in Scripture to signify holiness or a moral perfection), and how was he afterwards cast as profane out of the mountain of God?

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The name given Lucifer at creation, “the anointed cherub” (Ezek 28:14), Edwards believed, pointed to the fact that he was created as the highest of all the angels. He writes, “Anointing of old was used as a note of distinction, to show that that person was marked out and distinguished from all the rest for a higher dignity.”\(^{37}\) Lucifer was also known in Ezekiel 28:14 as “the cherub that covereth on God’s holy mountain,” and the cherub “in the midst of the stones of fire.”\(^{38}\) In Ezekiel 28:16 there seems to be a reference to the covering cherub within the temple’s Holy of Holies, in the presence of God’s throne that use wings to cover his throne.\(^{39}\) From this context, this cherub is the

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\(^{37}\) Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 980,” in *WJE*, 20:297. Edwards continues, He is called “the anointed cherub.” This expression alone shows him to have been set higher than any other cherub, for his being anointed must signify his being distinguished from all others: anointing of old was used as a note of distinction, to show that that person was marked out and distinguished from all the rest for a higher dignity. The Lord’s anointed in Israel was he that God, of his mere good pleasure, had appointed to the chief dignity in Israel. So the Lord’s anointed among the cherubim is the cherub that God had appointed to the highest dignity of all. ‘Tis said, Ezekiel 28:14, “Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth, and I have set thee so,” i.e. plainly, it has been my pleasure to set thee, by my anointing, in the highest dignity of all. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 980,” in *WJE*, 20:297).

\(^{38}\) Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 980,” in *WJE*, 20:297-98. Edwards writes, He is called the cherub that covereth on God’s holy mountain, Ezekiel 28:14, and the covering cherub “in the midst of the stones of fire,” Ezekiel 28:16, in which there seems to be a reference to the cherubim in the temple, in the Holy of Holies, next to the throne of God, that covered the throne with their wings. See Exodus 25:19-20 and Exodus 27:9. From this it appears that [by] the covering cherub, is meant the cherub next to the throne of God himself having a place in the very Holy of Holies. There were represented two cherubim that covered the mercy seat in the temple, that are called by the Apostle “the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat” (Hebrews 9:5), which represents the great dignity and honor of the cherubims that are next [to] God’s throne and are covering cherubims. But before the fall of this cherub, he is spoken of as being admitted alone to this great honor and nearness to God’s throne, an honor that he was anointed to above his fellows. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 980,” in *WJE*, 20:297)

\(^{39}\) Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 980,” in *WJE*, 20:298. Edwards writes, This covering cherub is here spoken [of] as the top of all the creation, or the sum and height of all creature perfection in wisdom and beauty. Ezekiel 28:12, “Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” He is spoken of as being in the midst of many things that are very bright and beautiful, Ezekiel 28:13–14, but walking up and down amongst them, as having the sum of all their beauty completed, perfected and sealed up in himself. It seems implied that no being is stronger than Beelzebub and able to bind him, but God himself. Matthew 12:29, with the context. . . . These things show another thing wherein Jesus is exalted into the place of Lucifer, that whereas he had the honor to dwell in the holies continually, so Jesus is there entered not as the high priests of old, but to be there continually, but in this respect is exalted higher than Lucifer ever was, that whereas Lucifer was only near the throne, or kneeling on the mercy seat in humble posture covering it with his wings,
being in closest proximity to the throne of God. Edwards comments, “Before the fall of this cherub, he is spoken of as being admitted alone to this great honor and nearness to God’s throne, an honor that he was anointed to be above his fellows.”40 This anointed cherub who has taken residence upon the “holy mountain of God” is also spoken of as the “top of all creation, or the sum and height of all creature perfection in wisdom and beauty (Ezek 28:12).”41 In Ezekiel 28:13-14, the cherub is referred to as dwelling in the midst of all things “bright and beautiful, but walking up and down” among them as possessing “the sum of all their beauty completed, perfected and sealed up in himself.”42 Edwards believed Lucifer to be the strongest being in the created universe and only able to be bound by God himself.

The Hebrew text of Ezekiel refers to this “cherub” as mashiach (Messiah), it may be concluded, Edwards suggests, that “Satan, before his fall, was the Messiah or Christ . . . exalted into his place in heaven.”43 Yet, as the second person of the Godhead, Christ is exalted supremely higher than Lucifer. Edwards explains,

> These things show another thing wherein Jesus is exalted into the place of Lucifer, that whereas he had the honor to dwell in the holies continually, so Jesus is there entered not as the high priests of old, but to be there continually, but in this respect is exalted higher than Lucifer ever was, that whereas Lucifer was only near the throne, or kneeling on the mercy seat in humble posture covering it with his wings, Jesus is admitted to sit down forever with God on the throne.44

> In other words, while Lucifer was “only near the throne,” Christ, being supremely higher and more excellent in his being, was allowed to “sit down forever with

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God on the throne.” This conclusion results in Edwards astonishing statement:

Lucifer, in having the excellency of all those glorious things that were about him all summed up in him, he was a type of Christ, in whom all the glory and excellency of all elect creatures is more properly summed [up] as the head and fountain of all, as the brightness of all that reflects the light of the sun is summed up in the sun.45

This archangel was assigned to “cover” or “protect” “the beloved race, elect man, that was God’s jewel, his treasure, his first fruits, his precious thing laid up in God’s ark or chest or cabinet hid in the secret of God’s presence.”46 In other words, Lucifer, according to Edwards, was employed at the creation of man to be redeemed humanities’ protector, but “he fell from his innocency and dignity, and Jesus in his stead becomes the cherub that covereth, the greater protector and Savior of elect men, that gathers them as a hen her chickens under her wings (Matt 23:37).”47

The Fall of Lucifer

It was the very excellence, according to Edwards, of Lucifer that became the occasion of his fall from grace. Edwards believed the temptation of the angels that “occasioned their rebellion was that when God was about to create man, or had first created him, God declared his decree to the angels that one of that human nature should be his Son, his best beloved, his greatest favorite, and should be united to his eternal


46 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 908,” in WJE, 20:299. Edwards suggests, Another respect also Jesus succeeds Lucifer, viz. in being the covering cherub. The word translated cover often and commonly signifies to protect. It was committed to this archangel especially to have the care of protecting the beloved race, elect man, that was God’s jewel, his treasure, his first fruits, his precious thing laid up in God’s ark or chest or cabinet hid in the secret of God’s presence. That was the great business the angels were made for, and therefore was especially committed to the head of the angels. But he fell from his innocency and dignity, and Jesus in his stead becomes the cherub that covereth, the great protector and Savior of elect men, that gathers them as a hen her chickens under her wings [Matthew 23:37]. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 908,” in WJE, 20:299).

Thus, Christ assumes the role as “their head and king,” and in being their head and king, redeemed humanity will be “given to him and should worship him and be his servants, attendants and ministers.” God, who declared before the foundation of the world his great love for the race of mankind through Christ, Edwards says, “Gave the angels the charge of them as ministering spirits to men.” In essence, this event caused the fall of the anointed cherub, Lucifer, and a great number of the other holy angels.

Edwards explains that Lucifer could not bear the thought that he was employed to serve and protect those who were hierarchically below him within creation. Edwards explains, “Satan, or Lucifer, or Beelzebub, being the archangel, one of the highest of the angels, could not bear it, thought it below him and a great debasing of him; so he conceived rebellion against the Almighty and drew away a vast company of the heavenly hosts with him.” Because Jesus Christ was fashioned in the likeness of men in his incarnation, the
race whom Satan viewed as inferior to his excellence and beauty, the angels “could not
bear” that such a being in human form “should rule over them in glory and should be
their king and head to communicate happiness to them.”52 Edwards frames this argument
within the context of his history of redemption: “Though Christ did [not] actually begin
the work and business of a mediator till man had fallen, yet seeing the world, even in its
very creation, was designed to be for the use of Christ in the great affair of
redemption.”53 It was after the fall of man into sin that Christ then took up the great
reconciliation work between God and humanity and began to govern the world as
Mediator.54 The purpose of creation, for which the angels unceasingly rejoice, was to be
Christ’s great accomplishment of redemption. Therefore, “God intended to make them
[elect mankind], though created after the angels, and of a much inferior nature to them,
the principal end of creation,” and that as a result of Christ’s work in redemption, “they
were to be exalted higher in glory than themselves, and were to be, under Christ,


53 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 833,” in WJE, in 20:43. Edwards continues,

Christ had his delegated dominion over the world committed to him as soon as the creation of
the world was finished. For though Christ did [not] actually begin the work and business of a mediator
till man had fallen, yet seeing the world, even in its very creation, was designed to be for the use of
Christ in the great affair of redemption, and his purposes in that work were the end of the creation,
and of all God’s providences in it from the beginning; therefore, the government of the world was
committed into his hands from the very beginning, for even the very creation was committed into his
hands for that reason, as the Apostle intimates, Ephesians 3:9-10. Much more have we reason to think
that the disposal of it was committed into his hands when it was made, because it was created for his
disposal and use. It was therefore most fit that it should be committed to him, not only in the actual
accomplishment of that great work of his, the work of redemption, but also in those antecedent
dispensations that were preparatory to it. During that short space of time that was taken up in the
preparation before the work of redemption actually began, it was most meet that Christ should have
the disposal of those things that were to prepare the way for his own work; otherwise the work would
not wholly be in his hands. For the accomplishing of the work itself, so as best to suit his own purpose
and pleasure, depends in a great measure on the preparation that was made for it; and so there is the
same reason that the preparation should be in his hands as the work itself. (Edwards, “Miscellanies,
No. 833,” in WJE, in 20:43)

ministering spirits to them.” Edwards sees Christ as possessing principal dominion over the world he created, as granted to him by God the Father, and therefore “should have this dominion in that nature as the head of that race.” This was the occasion of the fall as “they thought they were unequally dealt with, and hence pride arose; and they could not deign for such purposes to be subject to the Son of God, and to have this inferior nature so exalted above them.”

Edwards writes,

It seems to be probable that the temptation of the angels that occasioned their rebellion was that when God was about to create man, or had first created him, God declared his decree to the angels that one of that human nature should be his Son…and that he should be their head and king.

Thus, “Satan . . . could not bear it, thought it below him and a great debasing of him; so he conceived rebellion against the Almighty, and drew a vast company of the heavenly hosts with him.” Edwards says,

Lucifer was his [God’s] firstborn, and was the firstborn of every creature. But when it was revealed to him, that as high and as glorious as he was, that he must be a ministering spirit to the race of mankind that he had seen newly created, that appeared
so feeble, mean and despicable, so vastly inferior not only to him, the prince of the
angels and head of the universe, but also to the inferior angels, and that he must be
subject to one of that race that should hereafter be born, he could not bear it. This
occasioned his fall, and now he with the other angels he drew away with him are
fallen. Elect men are translated to supply their places, and are exalted vastly higher
in heaven than they. And Jesus Christ, the chief and head prince and captain of all
elect men, is translated and set in the throne that Lucifer, the chief head and prince
of the angels, left, to be the head of the angels in his stead, the head of all principality
and power, that all the angels might do obeisance to him. For God said, “Let all the
angels of God worship him” [Hebrews 1:6]. And God made him his firstborn instead
of Lucifer, higher than all those “thrones, dominions, principalities and powers,” and
made him, yea, made him in his stead, “the firstborn of every creature” [Colossians
1:15], and made him also in his stead “the bright and morning star” [Revelation
22:16], and head and prince of the universe, yea, gave this honor, dignity and power
unto him in an infinitely higher and more glorious manner than ever he had done to
Lucifer, and appointed him to conquer, subdue and execute vengeance upon that
great rebel. Satan aspired to be like the Most High, but God exalted one of mankind,
the race that he envied, and from envy to whom he rebelled against God, to be indeed
like the Most High, to a personal union with the eternal Son of God and exalted him
to proper divine honor and dignity, set him at his own right hand, on his own throne,
and committed to him proper divine power and authority, constituting him the
supreme, absolute and universal Lord of the universe, and judge of every creature,
the darling of the whole creation, “the brightness of God's glory and express image
of his person” [Hebrews 1:3], as God-man, as in his divine nature he is the natural
image of God.60

It may well be imagined that certain angels were leaders in this rebellion and drew the
others with them into sin: “‘Tis probable that of the angels that fell, some one or a few of
the chief, first entered the design of rebellion. They, being some of the highest of the
angels, could not bear that which they looked upon [as] so great a degradation; and they
influenced and tempted others.”61

The account of Lucifer’s rebellion and the angelic objection in serving an
incarnate Christ holds ancient roots. A fourth-century text, The Life of Adam and Eve, also
known in its Greek version as the Apocalypse of Moses, is a Jewish apocryphal group of
writings recounting the lives of Adam and Eve from after their expulsion from the Garden
of Eden to their deaths.62 This work states that the devil first rebelled when he refused to


bow before Adam. Edwards’ view of the fall of the reprobate angels corresponds to his view of the confirmation of the elect angels in that both events center upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Italian Reformer Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590) was a professor of Old Testament and theology who taught at Strassburg and Heidelberg. Zanchi included an extended systematic discussion of angels in the first part of his De Operibus Dei intra Spacium Sex Dierum Creates (On the Works of God Created within Six Days), published at Neustadt-an-der-Haardt in 1591, shortly after his death. Edwards also employs the assistance of the Puritan Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), who served as a member of the Westminster Assembly, who often points to Zanchi’s writings as the genesis of these thoughts: Goodwin writes,

God, I say, proclaimed the war, and the quarrel hath continued from the beginning of the world to this day, and will do, until Satan be put out of the air; for so long he is to have his kingdom, though Christ beateth him out of it every day in the world, and so will continue to do, till he hath won the world from him, and then he will chain him up in the bottomless pit.

In his sermons on Ephesians 2, Goodwin posits a slightly hypothetical theological reflection with regard to the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. He contends that it was supposed

rationally and probably, by Zanchi . . . that upon setting up, or at leastwise upon the notice that the angels had of the setting up of a kingdom, for the man Christ Jesus . . . and that the human nature was to be assumed up into the second person, and he to be the head of all principality and power, and that angels and men should have their

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63 Joad Raymond, Milton’s Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75-76.


The source of Satan’s fall and that of the fallen angels originates when they discovered the plan of God in sending forth his Son in an incarnate form to establish a kingdom over men, and thus “they did set up another kingdom against him.”66 The “latter theologians,” according to Goodwin, based this accepted theological position upon Jude 6 and that in “leaving their habitation,” Lucifer led the angels to set up an opposing and competitive kingdom to Christ.67 Like Edwards, Goodwin will not “insist upon it,” but he explores the idea:

Thus, I say, these writers that I have mentioned do think, and they allege that place in the Epistle of Jude, ver. 6, where the sin of the angels being described, it is said, ‘they kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation,’ which, say they, is not there brought in as their punishment; they left that station God had set them in, and they left their dwelling in heaven, to set up a kingdom here below in opposition to Christ, and so to have an independent kingdom of themselves; for which God hath condemned them into eternal torment and to hell, and “delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment,” 2 Peter ii. 4. And to set up this great kingdom is their business, and therefore they now do associate themselves together, not out of love, but as becometh rational creatures that would drive on a project and a design. Our Saviour Christ in that place, Matt. xii., speaks of it as the great end that Satan prosecuteth. Satan, saith he, will not cast out Satan, for that would divide his kingdom, and he is tender of that, that is his great design.69

In proposing his view of the fall of Lucifer from heaven, Goodwin enunciates his own argument: (1) true unbelief is the rejection of truth and the Christ of truth (John 8:25ff); (2) Satan did not remain in truth but from the beginning has been fundamentally a liar and murderer; and (3) therefore, since the sin of the Jewish people in the rejection of their Messiah, the incarnate Son, so must Satan’s sin be of the same type for them to be properly compared. Goodwin expounds,

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69 Goodwin, The Works of Thomas Goodwin, 2:44.
That place in John viii. 44, where Christ lays open both the devil’s sin, and the sin of the Jews. The sin of the Jews was, that they would not receive that truth which Christ had delivered to them. . . . And so from hence came he to be a murderer, a hater of this man Christ Jesus, and of this kingdom, and of mankind; for he that hateth God, or he that hateth Christ, is, in what in him lieth, a murderer of him, and he shewed it in falling upon man. And they back it with this reason why it should be so meant: because otherwise the devil’s sin, which he compares theirs unto, had not been so great as theirs, there had not been a likeness between the sin of the one and the other. His sin had only been telling of a lie, a lie merely in speech, and theirs had been a refusing of that great truth, Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Head, and so the devil’s sin would have been less than theirs; whereas he is made the great father of this great lie, of this great stubbornness to receive Christ, and to contradict this truth; and this, saith he, he hath opposed from the beginning, with all his might, and he setteth your hearts a-work to kill me. But, I say, I will not stand upon this, because I only deliver it as that which is the opinion of some, and hath some probability.70

For this purpose, Jesus came to the earth. Satan tempts Jesus by offering the kingdoms of the world, and because Christ is the incumbent king, Goodwin writes, he now asserts his authority

as striking at the very spirit of the devil’s sin. He shall break thy head . . . God, I say, proclaimed the war, and the quarrel hath continued from the beginning of the world to this day, and will do until Satan be put out of this air. . . . The great thing in Christ’s eye [is] to bring down the devil’s kingdom.71

In contrast, the Reformer John Calvin did not believe Scripture provides enough material to generate a comprehensive demonology. Therefore, unlike Goodwin and Edwards, Calvin refuses to be drawn into philosophical conjecture regarding the fall of Satan. Calvin illustrates this in his Commentary on Genesis 3 where he recognizes the serpent as Satan and refers to his nature, but not to his beginning or fall, since such information is not provided within the text.72 In his commentary on Isaiah 14,73 which is a text employed by Edwards when referring to the creation and fall of Satan, Calvin once again rejects the temptation to speculate and instead limits his own interpretation of the text to a more literal application to the King of Babylon and the King of Tyre. Calvin’s


73 See John Calvin, Isaiah 1–32, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974).
method of discerning the doctrine of demons is best summed up by these words:

Some persons grumble that Scripture does not in numerous passages set forth systematically and clearly that fall of the devil’s, its cause, manner, time, and character. But because this has nothing to do with us, it was better not to say anything, or at least to touch upon it lightly, because it did not befit the Holy Spirit to feed our curiosity with empty histories to no effect. And we see the Lord’s purpose was to teach nothing in his sacred oracles except what we should learn to our edification.”

Calvin’s whole attitude and theological interpretation of demonology is governed by this approach. He employs this approach time and again in his rejection of both prevalent fantasies that plagued Protestant concepts of Satan and the unnecessary conjecture about the demonic, which was so characteristic of Roman Catholic theology.

**Result of the Fall**

Lucifer’s sin, according to Jonathan Edwards, resulted in a series of reversals and replacements that took place. When some angels fell,

elect men are translated to supply their places, and are exalted vastly higher in heaven than they. And Jesus Christ . . . is translated and set in the throne that Lucifer, the chief head and prince of the angels, left, to be the head of the angels in his stead . . . that all the angels might do obeisance to him.

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75 For a fuller account of the historical and theological background of demonology in the theology of John Calvin, see C. A. M. Hall, *With the Spirit’s Sword: The Drama of Spiritual Warfare in the Theology of John Calvin* (Zurich: P. G. Keller, 1963).

76 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in *WJE*, 20:191. Edwards writes, As the devil was the highest of all the angels, so he was the very highest of all God’s creatures. He was the top and crown of the whole creation; he was the brightest part of the heaven of heavens, that brightest part of all the creation; he was the head of the angels, that most noble rank of all created beings, and therefore, when spoken of under that type of him the **Behemoth**, he is said to be “the chief of the ways of God” (Job 40:19). And since it is revealed that there is a certain order and government among the angels—the superior angels have some kind of authority over others that are of lower rank—and since Lucifer was the chief of them all, we may suppose that he was the head of the whole society, the captain of the whole host. He was the archangel, the prince of the angels, and all did obeisance unto him. And as the angels, as the ministers of God’s providence, have a certain superintendency and rule over the world, or at least over some parts of it that God has committed to their care, hence they are called “thrones, dominions, principalities and powers” [Colossians 1:16]. Therefore, seeing Lucifer was the head and captain and prince of all, and the highest creature in the whole universe, we may suppose that he had in some respect—as God’s chief servant, and the grand minister of his providence and the top of the creation—in some respect committed to him power, dominion and principality over the whole creation, and all the kingdom of providence. And as all the angels are all
God gave to Christ “honor, dignity, and power . . . in an infinitely higher and more glorious manner than ever he had done to Lucifer, and appointed him to conquer, subdue and execute vengeance upon that great rebel.”  

Yet the fall of Lucifer had considerable meaning within the sovereign and providential plan of God. This “sudden fall” of “the highest and most glorious of all creatures” was intended by God “to show the emptiness and vanity of the creature.”

Edwards paints a dramatic image of cataclysmic conflict in heaven at the moment Lucifer turned against God and called for the rest of the angels to join him in his rebellion: “When Lucifer rebelled and sat up himself as a head in opposition to God . . . Christ the Son of God manifested himself as an opposite head, and appeared graciously to dissuade and retrain by his grace the elect angels from hearkening to Lucifer’s
called “the sons of God” [Job 38:7], Lucifer was his firstborn, and was the firstborn of every creature. But when it was revealed to him, that as high and as glorious as he was, that he must be a ministering spirit to the race of mankind that he had seen newly created, that appeared so feeble, mean and despicable, so vastly inferior not only to him, the prince of the angels and head of the universe, but also to the inferior angels, and that he must be subject to one of that race that should hereafter be born, he could not bear it. This occasioned his fall, and now he with the other angels he drew away with him are fallen. Elect men are translated to supply their places, and are exalted vastly higher in heaven than they. And Jesus Christ, the chief and head prince and captain of all elect men, is translated and set in the throne that Lucifer, the chief head and prince of the angels, left, to be the head of the angels in his stead, the head of all principality and power, that all the angels might do obeisance to him. For God said, “Let all the angels of God worship him” [Hebrews 1:6]. And God made him his firstborn instead of Lucifer, higher than all those “thrones, dominions, principalities and powers,” and made him, yea, made him in his stead, “the firstborn of every creature” [Colossians 1:15], and made him also in his stead “the bright and morning star” [Revelation 22:16], and head and prince of the universe, yea, gave this honor, dignity and power unto him in an infinitely higher and more glorious manner than ever he had done to Lucifer, and appointed him to conquer, subdue and execute vengeance upon that great rebel. Satan aspired to be like the Most High, but God exalted one of mankind, the race that he envied, and from envy to whom he rebelled against God, to be indeed like the Most High, to a personal union with the eternal Son of God and exalted him to proper divine honor and dignity, set him at his own right hand, on his own throne, and committed to him proper divine power and authority, constituting him the supreme, absolute and universal Lord of the universe, and judge of every creature, the darling of the whole creation, “the brightness of God’s glory and express image of his person” [Hebrews 1:3], as God-man, as in his divine nature he is the natural image of God. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 936,” in WJE, 20:191)


temptation.”

Edwards states standing with Christ and the unfallen angels was “the
glorious Michael as their captain.” In support of this view, Edwards cites the “war in
heaven” of Revelation 12:7-9, not as a prediction of a final battle of good and evil at the
end of days, but a portrayal of a primeval struggle at the dawn of history. Even though
the unfallen angels were not confirmed in goodness during this early juncture, they
nonetheless owed their rescue from ruin to “the free and sovereign distinguishing grace
of Christ” that “upheld and preserved” them. Edwards explained, “Christ was the
Savior of the elect angels, for though he did not save them as he did elect men—from
ruin they had already deserved and were condemned to . . . yet he saved ‘em from eternal
destruction they were in great danger of.’” The angels, as well as elect humanity, trusted
in Christ for their spiritual well-being, and they were called to “self-emptiness . . . and
humble dependence” on Christ. Edwards also specified that the Holy Spirit is given to
the angels through Christ, which serves as another analogy with the process of human
salvation.


They were dependent on the sovereign grace of Christ to uphold them and assist them in this service,
and to keep them from ruining themselves as the fallen angels had done. By the fall of Lucifer, that
greatest, brightest and strongest of all creatures, especially, they were taught their own emptiness and
insufficiency for themselves, and were led humbly in a self-diffidence to look to Christ, seek to him
and depend on him, “in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell” [Colossians 1:19],
to preserve them. So that they all along hung upon him through the whole course of their obedience
during their time of trial, having no absolute promise—as believers in Christ have amongst men, of
perseverance in one act of faith—but only God the Father had revealed to them that if they were
preserved, it must be by influence and help from his Son, and also made known to them the infinite
riches of the grace of his Son, and its sufficiency for them, and given them experience of it in
preserving them when the other angels fell; and God directed them to seek to his Son for help. But this
humble dependence was part of their duty or work by which they were to obtain eternal life, and it
was not, as it is with men the fruit of the purchase of life already made, the first act of which entitles
It is likely that the unfallen angels suffered great consternation at the fall of Lucifer: “The elect angels probably felt great fear at the time of the revolt of Lucifer. . . . They were then probably the subject of great surprise and great sense of their own danger of falling likewise.”85 From this, Edwards concludes that the heavenly state of the angels is not the panacea commonly imagined: “‘Tis a thing supposed without proof that the glorious inhabitants of heaven never felt any such thing or trouble or uneasiness of any kind. Their perfect innocency and holiness don’t prove it; God may suffer an innocent creature to be in a trouble for their great happiness.”86 It was only in the course of subsequent redemptive history that a truly peaceful and settled state came to heaven: “The highest heavens was not a place of such happiness and rest before Christ’s ascension as it was afterwards, for the angels were not till then confirmed.”87 For Edwards, the great struggle for the angels was their constant uneasiness that they too might fall along with

to all other fruits of the purchase through eternity. Thus the angels did depend on Christ, and they were supported by strength and grace from him freely communicated; it was sovereign grace that he was not obliged to afford them, for he was not obliged to afford them any more grace than he did the angels that fell. So that it can truly be said of the angels that they have eternal life by sovereign grace through Christ in a way of self-emptiness, self-diffidence and humble dependence on him. So far is the way of the elect angels receiving eternal life like that of elect men’s receiving it. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 937,” in WJE, 20:195-96)


87 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 938,” in WJE, 20:197. Edwards writes, ‘Tis a thing supposed without proof that the glorious inhabitants of heaven never felt any such thing as trouble or uneasiness of any kind. Their perfect innocency and holiness don’t prove it; God may suffer an innocent creature to be in a trouble for their greater happiness. The nature and end of that place of glory don’t prove it, for if that did not hinder sin from entering, neither will it necessarily hinder trouble from entering there. The elect angels probably felt great fear at the time of the revolt of Lucifer and the angels that followed it. They were then probably the subjects of great surprise and great sense of their own danger of falling likewise; and when they saw the wrath of God executed on the fallen angels, which they had no certain promise that they should not suffer also by their own disobedience, being not yet confirmed, it probably struck them with fear. And the highest heavens was not a place of such happiness and rest before Christ’s ascension as it was afterwards, for the angels were not till then confirmed. So that it was in Christ, God-man, that the angels have found rest. The angels therefore have this to sweeten their safety and rest that they have it after they have known what it is to be in great danger and to be distressed with fear. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 938,” in WJE, 20:197-98)
Lucifer and the other demonic hordes. It was not until the confirmation of unfallen angels at Christ’s ascension that this particular fear was wholly and permanently removed.

If the angels that fell brought grief to those who did not fall, the fall of humanity into sin was yet another surprise and shock. Edwards writes,

Therefore, knowing God’s love to them [i.e., the humans], and election of them, before they fell, [the angels] were doubtless greatly surprised when men fell and had sinned against God: for they could no way conceive how it was possible now, consistent with the rule which God had fixed with men and with the glory of God, for God now to fulfill his own decree, and accomplish upon men those eternal designs of love, that he had given them a general intimation of.⁸⁸

Regarding Adam’s fall, Edwards acknowledges the metaphysical dilemma in seeking to account for the origin of evil: “It has been a matter attended with much difficulty and perplexity, how sin came into the world.”⁹⁰ If the world was created good, then whence did sin arise? Yet there is no need of assuming that God withdrew grace from Adam—what Edwards calls “original righteousness.”⁹⁰ Instead, from the time of Adam’s creation, God

had withheld [sic] his confirming grace, that grace which is given now in heaven, such grace as shall fit the soul to surmount every temptation. This was the grace Adam was to have had if he had stood, when he came to receive his reward. This grace God was not obliged to grace him.⁹¹

For angels and humans alike, constancy in a right relationship with God is the fruit of confirming grace, withheld by God from both until after the time of creation. In “History of Redemption,” Edwards argues that as soon as man fell,

Christ the eternal Son of God clothed himself with his mediatorial character and therein presented himself before the Father. . . . ‘Tis manifest that Christ began to exercise the office of mediator between God and man as soon as man fell because mercy began to be exercised towards man immediately.⁹²

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The confirmation of the unfallen angels—though doubtless a gift of God’s grace—was brought about by various causes. God made use of “means” to bring about this result: “The angels that stood are doubtless confirmed in holiness and their allegiance to God, so that they will never sin, and they are out of danger of it. But yet I believe God makes use of means to confirm them.” They are confirmed by “the sight of terrible destruction” of the fallen angels, by “the eternal damnation of reprobates amongst men,” and “by the recognition of God’s justice in the sufferings of Christ.” Edwards wrote,

The fall of the angels that fell, was a great establishment and confirmation to the angels that stood. They resisted a great temptation by which the rest fell . . . and they resisted and overcoming great temptation, naturally tends greatly to confirm in righteousness. And probably they had been engaged on God’s side, in resisting those that fell, when there was war.

The unfallen angels observed the “dreadful issue” (i.e., outcome) of the demons’ revolt. Arguing by analogy, one may conclude that the saints in heaven are “made perfectly holy and impeccable by means” as well as the angels, including especially the “beatific vision.”

Edwards insisted that Lucifer’s fall redounded to the ultimate good of the unfallen angels: “The elect angels are greatly increased, both in holiness and happiness, since the fall of those angels that fell, and are immensely more holy than ever Lucifer and his angels were.” Thus “the fall of the angels laid a foundation for the greater holiness of the elect angels, as it increased their knowledge of God and themselves . . . and they increased in holiness by persevering in obedience.”

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human race, “what the fallen angels have done for the ruin of mankind, has only proved an occasion of mankind’s being exalted into their stead and to fill up that room that was left vacant in heaven by their fall.”⁹⁹ This passage may be compared with Anselm’s Cur Deus Homo,¹⁰⁰ where elect humans occupy a place in heaven that was, in effect, left vacant by the fall of Lucifer and the angels who rebelled with him.

Lest anyone consider the plan of God thwarted because of the fall of Lucifer, Edwards reports,

> God in his providence was pleased thus to show the emptiness and vanity of the creature by suffering the insufficiency of the highest and most glorious of all creatures, the head and crown of the whole creation, to appear by his sudden fall from his glorious height into the lowest depth of hatefulness, deformity and misery.¹⁰¹

God’s grand design was to demonstrate the “creature’s emptiness in itself,” and then to “fill it with himself in an eternal, unalterable fullness and glory.”¹⁰² Edwards speculated that the fall of the angelic creatures was a precursor of another fall that would happen in the garden of paradise. The fall of Lucifer was a sign “the old creation or the old heavens and earth were to go to ruin and perish in some sense, or at least all was to be emptied; great part of the old creation was actually to sink into total and eternal perdition, as fallen angels and fallen men.”¹⁰³ In a sense, this great fall pointed to the future ruin of all mankind, the restoration of some, the destruction of the highest heavens, and cause all of creation and its inhabitants to see their own emptiness and utter insufficiency, and so as it were to perish or die as to self-dependence and all self-fullness, and to be brought to an entire dependence on the sovereign grace and all-sufficiency of God, to be communicated to them by his Son as their head. . . . The whole old creation, both heaven and earth, as to all its

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natural glory and creature fullness, was to be pulled down, and thus way was to be made for the creation of the new heavens and new earth, or setting forth the whole elect universe in its consummate and everlasting immutable glory, in the fullness of God, in a great, most conspicuous, immediate and universal dependence on his power and sovereign grace, and also on the glorious and infinitely excellent nature and essence of God, as the infinite fountain of glory and love, the beholding and enjoying of which, and union with which, being the elect creature’s all in all—all its strength, all its beauty, all its life, its fruit, its honor and its blessedness.104

The fall of Lucifer ultimately confirmed “the emptiness of all creatures in themselves.”105 Edwards states that it was never the will of God that a mere creature should be the head of the creation, but a divine person, and “that he should be the crown and glory of creation, heaven was the first part of the creation that was subject to ruin; and it shall be the last part that shall be renewed or amended by the new creation.”106 He continues,

There are two parts of the creation: one is the world of man, and that is this visible world; and the other is the world of angels, and that is heaven. The whole is to be changed. The former shall be destroyed because all men fell, and only an elect number saved out of it. The other shall not be destroyed, because all the angels did not fall; those that stood supported it. A blessing was left in it, and therefore God said, destroy it not. And therefore the change that is to be made in that is to be of a contrary nature to destruction: it is to be made infinitely more glorious by a new creation. And therefore God's dealings with respect to the world of angels are contrary to his dealings with the world of men. The world of men is to be destroyed, and therefore elect men are taken out of it and carried into the world of angels, and reprobate men left in it to perish and sink with it. The world of angels is not to be destroyed, but renewed and glorified, and therefore reprobate angels are taken out of it and cast into the world of men, and elect angels are kept in it to be renewed and glorified with it.107

Because God’s design was to put on display the emptiness of the creature and its “exceeding insufficiency,” God “suffered both angels and men quickly to fall, and the old creation quickly to go to ruin.”108 The punishment of the devils is certain: “God

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brings the punishment of the devils upon ‘em for their proud rebellion in heaven in this way, by making them the cause of their own torment and vexation to all eternity by their continually renewed acts of pride and spite.” According to Edwards, God condemns the demonic horde “to that same disposition which they exercised when they fell, and by that means makes them forever a procuring their own misery; and this is a misery they are plunged into as a punishment of their first rebellion.” Regarding their punishment, Edwards says,

They are punished for their procuring the fall of mankind. . . . God renders all Satan’s incessant labors and endeavors for the overthrow of mankind, and for defeating God’s design of glorifying himself in them . . . [as a means of] his own confusion and vexation, and of abundantly more brightly manifesting the glory of God and advancing the happiness of the elect.

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I don’t think we have good ground to be assured, that the sins of damned spirits that they commit after their damnation are no way liable to punishment because they ben’t in a state of trial but in a state of punishment; however, I believe this in one sense is true, and in another not. I believe all the misery that ever they endure or shall endure to all eternity is a punishment of their sin while in a state of trial, and every part of that misery a part of that punishment, and all the deserved and justly due punishment of that sin; so that those that have sinned most in a state of trial shall be punished most to all eternity, and in an exact proportion: and yet it shall be so ordered by the wisdom of God, that various parts of their punishment shall be so timed and placed and circumstanced as to be punishment also of their several acts of pride, or malice and spite against God and against his creatures that are not in a state of punishment. Thus God brings the punishment of the devils upon ‘em for their proud rebellion in heaven in this way, by making them the cause of their own torment and vexation to all eternity by their continually renewed acts of pride and spite. He gives them over forever to that same disposition which they exercised when they fell, and by that means makes them forever a procuring their own misery; and this is a misery they are plunged into as a punishment of their first rebellion. ‘Tis certain by the word of God that the devils are thus punished. They are punished for their procuring the fall of mankind: God curses the serpent for it, and without doubt God in that curse had a principal reference to the devil, who is the old serpent; the seed of the woman’s breaking his head is in punishment for that act of his. By means of Christ the Redeemer, God renders all Satan’s incessant labors and endeavors for the overthrow of mankind, and for defeating God’s design of glorifying himself in them, a means of his own confusion and vexation, and of abundantly more brightly manifesting the glory of God and advancing the happiness of the elect. He is a means of one of mankind being his judge. And so the event of his own great endeavors will prove every way [an] exceeding contradiction and mortification of his own restless, proud, malicious and revengeful spirit. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 258,” in *WJE*, 13:366-67)
The Kingdom of Satan

Edwards saw Satan as a “restless, proud, malicious and revengeful spirit.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 258,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:367.} Satan and all his demons “look upon the honor and happiness of mankind in all degrees” as “steps towards . . . their being set above them and over them.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 702,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:306} This explains the hatred demons have for human beings: “Their pride therefore stirs them up to labor with indefatigable industry and their utmost craft—instead of being subject to them, and to one of them as their King and their God, as God has declared—themselves to rule over them, and reign over them as god.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 702,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:306.} God’s plan for mankind is salvation, while Satan’s plan is one of destruction and damnation. Edwards asks the question as to why the “devil [who] is so cunning and subtile” would “endeavor to frustrate the designs of an omnipotent being.”\footnote{Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 48,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:227. Edwards explains, Seeing the devil is so cunning and subtile, it may seem a paradox, why he will endeavor to frustrate the designs of an omniscient being, or to pretend to counterwork him that is omnipotent, and will not suffer anything but what is for his own glory: seeing that God turns everything he does to the greater and more illustrious advancement of His own honor, and seeing he has experience of it, for so long a time, [that] all his deep laid contrivances have at last come out to his own overthrow, and the event has been directly contrary to his design. To this I say, that although the devil be exceeding crafty and subtile, yet he is one of the greatest fools and blockheads in the world, as the subtilest of wicked men are. Sin is of such a nature that it strangely infatuates and bewitches persons: makes men deliberately choose eternal torments rather than miss of their pleasure of a few days, and to esteem a little silver and gold above eternal happiness; makes men choose a few minutes pleasure, though eternal flames be joined therewith, rather than not have it—thus do the cunningest of wicked men. Sin has the same effect on the devils, to make them act like fools, and so much the more as it is greater in them than in others. The devil acts not according to his deliberate judgment, but is driven on to his own inexpressible torment by the fury of sin, malice, revenge and pride; is so entirely under the government of malice, that although he never attempted anything against God but he was disappointed, yet he cannot bear to lie still, and refrain from exerting himself with all his might and subtilty against the interest of holiness; though he, if he considered, might know that it will turn to its advantage. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 48,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:227)
also has the same effect on devils, “to make them act like fools, and so much the more as it is greater in them than in others.”¹¹⁶ This means that “the devil acts not according to his deliberate judgment, but is driven on to his own inexpressible torment by the fury of sin, malice, that although he never attempted anything against God but he was disappointed, yet he cannot bear to lie still,” Edwards adds, “and refrain from exerting himself with all his might and subtility against the interest of holiness.”¹¹⁷

Satan has been vehemently opposed to salvation since the beginning. This vehemence has resulted in various schemes against God’s plan of salvation. Edwards states, “Satan doubtless knew of the Messiah’s coming into the world, and could by prophecies guess pretty near at the time of it.”¹¹⁸ Edwards always speaks of the devil as growing in knowledge or advancing in wisdom. Satan is never omniscient, as “he did not know what to make of him [Christ], being much confounded by the strange descriptions of him in the Old testament, yet he expected he would be a person of wondrous wisdom and superlative excellency, and that he was to do wonderful things, and by some means overthrow his kingdom in the world.”¹¹⁹ Satan sought to oppose Christ and his reign by “setting up some monarch of the heathen world, and making of him exceeding potent and


¹¹⁷ Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 48,” in WJE, 13:227. On the devil as a “fool,” Aquinas wrote, “The demons much less fully understood [than the unfallen angels] the mystery of the Incarnation, when Christ was in the world. . . . For had they fully and certainly known that he was the Son of God and the effect of His passion, they would never have procured the crucifixion of the Lord of glory.” Thomas Aquinas, Suma Theologiae, ed Thomas Gilby (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) Ia, q. 64, a. I.

¹¹⁸ Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 156,” in WJE, 13:305. Edwards states, Satan doubtless knew of the Messiah’s coming into the world, and could by the prophecies guess pretty near at the time of it. And though he did not know what to make of him, being much confounded by the strange descriptions of him in the Old Testament, yet he expected he would be a person of wondrous wisdom and superlative excellency, and that he was to do wonderful things, and by some means overthrow his kingdom in the world. And ‘tis probable, he thought that he was to conquer all the heathen world and to reign over them in great glory here on earth, as well as to bring them off from heathenism to the true religion and holiness, one in order to the other; this appears to be his expectation, by his temptation on the high mountain. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 156,” in WJE, 13:305).

strong, and to get the world into his possession; so that he might be able, with his great power, wealth and immense numbers, having all the world on his side.” Edwards believed Satan accomplished this opposition to Christ by raising up the “Roman monarchy” in the time of Christ, which proved to be a kingdom that would be opposed to Christ’s kingdom. Edwards writes,

Hereby he thought to disappoint the Messiah in his design of conquering the world. For what could he, and his little handful of Jews, do against Caesar, with the strength of the whole world? Yea, Satan succeeded so well that he got the Roman monarchy thoroughly settled, against the time that he thought Christ was to come. The world began to be easy under the Roman government, insomuch that there was an universal peace at the time; and the power and strength of the empire was at its highest pitch under Augustus. Thus Satan contrived it, to prevent the kingdom of the Messiah.

In “A History of the Work of Redemption,” Edwards recognized that the cruel persecutions of the church during the first three centuries were because “Satan was very unwilling to let go his hold of so great a part of the world.” Edwards defined this

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120 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 156,” in WJE, 13:305-6. Edwards explains, And against this he made great preparation; in this, he thought, he would be beforehand with him, knowing nearly the time of his coming. His contrivance was, to be a means of setting up some other monarch of the heathen world, and making of him exceeding potent and strong, and to get the world into his possession; so that he might be able, with his great power, wealth and immense numbers, having all the world on his side, to resist the Messiah when he came: which he thought he had effectually brought to pass in the Roman monarchy, the kingdom of iron, by far the most potent that ever was. Hereby he thought to disappoint the Messiah in his design of conquering the world. For what could he, and his little handful of Jews, do against Caesar, with the strength of the whole world? Yea, Satan succeeded so well that he got the Roman monarchy thoroughly settled, against the time that he thought Christ was to come. The world began to be easy under the Roman government, insomuch that there was an universal peace at the time; and the power and strength of the empire was at its highest pitch under Augustus. Thus Satan contrived it, to prevent the kingdom of the Messiah. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 156,” in WJE, 13:305-6)


122 Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:390. Edwards writes, Thus great parts of the first three hundred years after Christ was spent in violent and cruel persecutions of the church of God by the Roman power. Satan was very unwilling to let go his hold of so great a part of the world, and every way the chief part of it, as the countries contained in the Roman empire were that he had had the quiet possession of for so many ages. And therefore when he saw it going so fast out of his hands, he bestirred himself to his utmost; all hell was, as it were, raised against it to oppose it with its utmost power. Satan thus exerting himself by the power of the heathen Roman empire is called the great red dragon in Scripture, having seven heads and ten horns, fighting against the woman clothed with the sun, in the Revelation 12 of Revelation. And the terrible conflict there was between the church of Christ and the powers of the heathen empire before Constantine’s time is there in verse seven represented by the war between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his
period of the Roman persecution as a period where “all hell was, as it were, raised against it [the church] to oppose it with its utmost power.”¹²³ He compares Satan’s control over the Roman empire as “the great red dragon in Scripture” in Revelation 12, and “the terrible conflict there was between the church of Christ and the powers of the heathen empire before Constantine’s time is there in verse seven represented by the war between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his angels.”¹²⁴

After the demise of the heathen Roman Empire, “Satan infested the church with heresies” in the form of Arianism and Pelagianism.¹²⁵ Then there arose two great works of the devil in the rise of Antichrist—identified by Edwards with Roman Catholicism—and the birth of Islam:

The kingdom of Antichrist . . . seems to be the masterpiece of all the contrivances of the devil against the kingdom of Christ . . . to turn the ministry of the Christian church into a ministry of the devil . . . to make an image of ancient paganism, and


¹²⁵ Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:405. Edwards said of these heresies,

The Arians began soon after Constantine came to the throne. They denied the doctrine of the Trinity, and denied the divinity of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and maintained that they were but mere creatures. This heresy increased more and more in the church, and prevailed like a flood that threatened to overflow all and entirely carry away the church of [God]; insomuch that before that age was out, that is, before the fourth century or hundred years after Christ was finished, the bigger part of the Christian world were become Arians. There were some emperors, the successors of Constantine, that were Arians; so that the Arians being the prevailing party, and having the civil authority of their side, did raise a great persecution against the true church of Christ. So that this heresy might well be compared to a flood out of the mouth of the serpent, that threatened to overflow all and quite carry away the woman. The Pelagian heresy arose in the beginning of the next century, or hundred years after Christ. It began by one Pelagius that was born in Britain; his British name was Morgan. He denied original sin, and held the power of free will, and denied the influence of the Spirit of God in conversion, and held many other things of like tendency; and this heresy did for a while greatly infest the church. Pelagius’ principal antagonist that wrote in defense of the orthodox was St. Augustine. (Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:405-6).
more than to restore what was lost in the empire by the overthrow of paganism in Constantine’s time.  

During the Middle Ages, “the true church” was “like the woman in the wilderness.” Yet “the rise of Antichrist was gradual,” with the church “growing more and more superstitious in worship, by degrees bringing in many ceremonies into the worship of God, till at length they brought in the worship of saints and set up images in their churches.” Edwards said,

During this time also, superstition and ignorance more and more prevailed. The holy Scripture by degrees was taken out of the hands of the laity, the better to promote

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126 Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:411. Edwards states, This is a contrivance of the devil to turn the ministry of the Christian church into a ministry of the devil, and to turn these angels of the church into fallen angels and so into devils; and in the tyranny and superstition and idolatry and persecution that he sets up, to make an image of ancient paganism, and more than to restore what was lost in the empire by the overthrow of paganism in Constantine’s time. So that by this means the head of the beast that was wounded unto death in Constantine has his deadly wound healed in Antichrist, Revelation 13:3; and the dragon that formerly reigned in the heathen Roman empire being cast out thence, after the beast with seven heads and ten horns rises in his room, gives him his power and seat and great authority, and all the world wonders after the beast. (Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:411)

127 Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:410. Edwards suggests, The true church in this space was for many hundred years in a state of great obscurity, like the woman in the wilderness, indeed almost hid from sight and observation. In speaking of the events of this space of time I would, 1. take notice of the great machinations and works of the devil against the kingdom of Christ during this time, and 2. how the church of Christ was upheld during this time. (Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:410)

128 Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:412. Edwards states, The rise of Antichrist was gradual. The Christian church corrupted itself in many things presently after Constantine’s time, growing more and more superstitious in its worship, by degrees bringing in many ceremonies into the worship of God, till at length they brought in the worship of saints and set up images in their churches, and the clergy usurped more, and the bishop of Rome gradually assuming more and more authority to himself. In the primitive times he was only a minister of a congregation, then a standing moderator of a presbytery, then a diocesan bishop, then a metropolitan which was equivalent to an archbishop, then he was a patriarch, then afterwards he claimed the power of universal bishop over the whole Christian church through the world, wherein he was opposed for a while but afterwards was confirmed in it by the civil power of the emperor in the year 606. After that he claimed the power of a temporal prince, and so was wont to carry two swords to signify that both the temporal and spiritual sword was his, and claimed more and more authority. Till at length he, as Christ’s vicar on earth, claimed the very same power that Christ would have if he was presently on earth and reigned on his throne, or the same power that belongs to God, and used to be called God on earth, and used to be submitted to by all the princes of Christendom. He claimed power to crown princes and degrade them at his pleasure, and this power was owned. And it came to this, that kings and emperors used to kiss his feet. The emperors were wont to receive their crowns at his hands.” (Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:412-13)
the privileges of the clergy. And instead of promoting knowledge among the people, they industriously promoted ignorance, ignorance, the mother of devotion. And so great was the darkness that learning almost ceased out of the world—the very priests themselves, most of ‘em, barbarously ignorant as to any commendable learning or any other knowledge than their hellish craft in oppressing and tyrannizing over the souls of the poor people. The superstition and wickedness of the church of Rome kept growing worse and worse, till the very time of the Reformation.129

The progression of the bishop of Rome went from being a minister of the congregation to a diocesan bishop to patriarch and so on until finally usurping the place of Christ himself. Roman Catholicism, though the “greatest and chief,” was only one of “those two great kingdoms that the devil in this period erected in opposition to the kingdom of Christ.”130

The second kingdom, resembling that of Antichrist, is the “Mohammedan kingdom, which is another great kingdom of mighty power and vast extent that Satan set up against the kingdom of Christ.”131 Edwards says the devil “set this up in the eastern empire as he did that of Antichrist in the western.”132 He suggests that the locusts of Revelation 9:3-11 may refer to the armies of Islamic conquest.133

After tracing the work of Satan through the centuries after the New Testament period, Edwards states, “I have shown what great works of Satan were wrought during this space of time in opposition to the kingdom [of Christ],” but “the church was upheld


133 Edwards says of the kingdom of Islam:
They began their empire about the year of Christ 1296, and began to invade Europe about 1300, and took Constantinople, and so became masters of all the eastern empire in the year 1453—which is not three hundred years ago. And thus all those cities and countries where were those famous churches of old that we read of in the New Testament: Jerusalem, Antioch; now all became subject to the Turks. And they took possession of Constantinople, which was named after Constantine the Great, being made by him the head city of the Roman empire, whereas Rome had been so till then. These are supposed to be prophesied of by the horsemen in the Revelation 9, beginning with the Revelation 9:15. And the remains of the Christians that are in those parts of the world, which are mostly of the Greek church, are in miserable slavery under them, and treated with a great deal of barbarity and cruelty, and are become mostly very ignorant and superstitious. (Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in WJE, 9:416)
through this dark day.”\textvisiblespace}\textsuperscript{134} In other words, much of the effort of Satan to overthrow the kingdom of Christ did not succeed in the way he had intended. Edwards shows how the unification of the nations under the Roman Empire served to advance the propagation of the gospel. When Satan saw “how wonderfully the gospel prevailed,” in the early church, he decided to “lead away many people into the more remote corners of the earth.”\textsuperspace\textvisiblespace}\textsuperscript{135} This included, Edwards believed, the indigenous peoples of America. Yet Satan’s “mimicking [of] God” by leading the pagan nations into the practice of blood offerings or “satisfactory sacrifice” served in preparing the Gentile world for the message of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.\textsuperspace\textvisiblespace}\textsuperscript{136} Once again, Satan’s crafty schemes could not thwart God’s ultimate plan and purpose of redemption. Nothing more clearly demonstrated the wisdom of God than his capacity to “carry on his designs from age to age” by employing the acts of “a most powerful and subtle enemy . . . Satan.”\textsuperspace\textvisiblespace}\textsuperscript{137} At first “the devil in heaven thought to have overcome God by strength.”\textsuperspace\textvisiblespace}\textsuperscript{138} Yet when this failed and he was “cast down to hell,” then “he thought to get the better of him by craft and subtlety. Therefore God shows by the


\textsuperspace\textsuperscript{135} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 815,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:525.

\textsuperspace\textsuperscript{136} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 307,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:391. Further, Edwards writes, They were the more prepared by the devil’s going such lengths as to require human sacrifices, which were common among the heathen, and sacrificing of children (and sometimes only sons), to receive this human sacrifice, Jesus Christ. Their minds were hereby possessed with such sort of notions [as] the satisfaction and propitiation of slain sacrifices, that it was a great preparation. And so indeed was [the] heathenish doctrines of deities’ being united to images, and the heathenish fables of heroes’ being begotten [by] gods, a preparation for their receiving the doctrine of the incarnation, of the Deity’s dwelling in a human [body], and the Son of God’s being conceived in the womb of a virgin by the power and Spirit of [God]. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 307,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:391-92)

\textsuperspace\textsuperscript{137} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No 619,” in \textit{WJE}, 18:152.

\textsuperspace\textsuperscript{138} Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 324,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:403. Edwards states, The devil in heaven thought to have overcome God by strength; but he was convinced by experience, by his being cast out down to hell, that it was in vain to oppose his strength to God’s. Therefore in the next place, though he saw God was stronger than he, yet he thought to get the better of him by craft and subtlety. Therefore God shows by the wonderful wisdom of the gospel that he can as easily overcome him by wisdom as power. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 324,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:403-4)
wonderful wisdom of the gospel that he can as easily overcome him by wisdom as power.” Repeatedly throughout all of redemptive history, God has turned all of the devil’s efforts against himself—“God renders all Satan’s incessant labors and endeavors for the overthrow of mankind . . . [as] a means of his own confusion and vexation.” Every “event of his own great endeavors will prove every way [an] exceeding contradiction and mortification of his own restless, proud, malicious and revengeful spirit.” Edwards points back to the reason Satan fell from his exalted place in heaven:

The devil envied man, whom he esteemed so much inferior to himself, his happiness in God’s protection; and thought to have made a slave and captive of him, to have held him in his chain, to have had him under his feet, and forever to have plagued him and triumphed over him. But how remarkable will he be mortified at the last day, when he shall be judged by a man, by one of the race, yea one that is as it were all the redeemed. They [the devils] must be brought in chains to have their judgment and condemnation before his throne, [he] (being united personally to the Deity) then sitting on the throne of God and clothed with his glory, together with all his assessors with him in his throne, judging of those fallen angels that thought to have had such good sport in their destruction.

The devils will be judged by the very race, of who they were jealous, which resulted in their original fall.

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140 Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 258,” in WJE, 13:366. Edwards writes, Thus God brings the punishment of the devils upon ‘em for their proud rebellion in heaven in this way, by making them the cause of their own torment and vexation to all eternity by their continually renewed acts of pride and spite. He gives them over forever to that same disposition which they exercised when they fell, and by that means makes them forever a procuring their own misery; and this is a misery they are plunged into as a punishment of their first rebellion. ‘Tis certain by the word of God that the devils are thus punished. They are punished for their procuring the fall of mankind: God curses the serpent for it, and without doubt God in that curse had a principal reference to the devil, who is the old serpent; the seed of the woman’s breaking his head is in punishment for that act of his. By means of Christ the Redeemer, God renders all Satan’s incessant labors and endeavors for the overthrow of mankind, and for defeating God’s design of glorifying himself in them, a means of his own confusion and vexation, and of abundantly more brightly manifesting the glory of God and advancing the happiness of the elect. He is a means of one of mankind being his judge. And so the event of his own great endeavors will prove every way [an] exceeding contradiction and mortification of his own restless, proud, malicious and revengeful spirit. (Edwards, “Miscellanies, No. 258,” in WJE, 13:366-67)


While the *Miscellanies* discussed the unfallen angels more than the demons, Edwards’ sermons reversed the pattern and focused more on the demons than the holy angels. When he preached about Satan and the demons, he stressed their hatred and malevolence for God, Christ, the church, and believers; their vigorous and untiring agency in disrupting and hindering the progress of the gospel and the conversion of sinners; and their agency within the lives of wicked people, whose thoughts and activities were, as it were, energized by Satan and by demonic power. For Edwards, wicked people were Satan’s “children” in the sense that they came to take on the characteristics of their diabolic parent and to resemble the devil. The result was indeed a frightening picture. A later phrase of Edwards’ preaching to the Indians is represented in “Warring with the Devil” (1754). Wilson H. Kimmach points out, “In keeping with the times, the sermon has a military motif, depicting the sinner defending himself from the devil as one would defend his home from an enemy.” Edwards’ text for this sermon was Luke 11:21-22, “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace.” He warned, “The devil is an enemy that is like a strong man armed. [He is an] enemy to God [and an] enemy to men.” Kimmach states, “In the Application of this sermon, Edwards hearkens back to the seventeenth-century English notion that the Indian peoples were the last citadel of Satan, justifying the Puritan settlements in part as outposts in a war for the souls of the Indians.” Edwards explains to his Indian congregation that they were “formerly under the power of that strong man


armed.”147 The devil is a very powerful adversary and some are still “overwhelmed by the devil’s devices,” so as to make them “salves . . . under his power.”148 Edwards warned that outside of Christ, there was no protection whatsoever from the malevolent power of Satan and his demons. The only shelter lay in the safety of Christ’s embrace. Those outside of Christ were not only the target of Satan’s malevolence, they were also at risk of becoming tools and instruments in the eternal ruin of others.

In his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards warns of the cunning and crafty system of Satan and his demons. Speaking of unbelievers, Edwards calls them “children of the devil,”149 and warns, “The devil stands ready to fall upon them and seize them at his own.”150 He attributes unbelievers as belonging to this kingdom of darkness, for, speaking of Satan, “he has their souls in his possession, and under his dominion.”151 Luke 11:21, Edwards comments, “represents them [unbelievers] as his [Satan’s] ‘goods.’” Edwards believed that unbelievers are watched by these demonic hordes and “they stand waiting for them, like greedy hungry lions that see their prey, and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back; if God should withdraw his hand, by which they are restrained, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls.”152

As to “why man has the offer of a Savior and the devils never had,” Edwards said it was “probable” that the demons’ sin “was attended with that malice and spite and haughty scornfulness, that was equivalent to the sin against the Holy Ghost. Their sin was


downright spiteful rebellion and a direct malicious war against God, a scorn of subjection and a proud seeking of his throne.”\textsuperscript{153} Edwards believed the devils exist in a state of punishment:

I believe this in one sense is true, and in another not. I believe all the misery that ever they endure or shall endure to all eternity is a punishment of their sin while in a state of trial, and every part of that misery a part of that punishment, and all the deserved and justly due punishment of that sin; so that those that have sinned most in a state of trial shall be punished most to all eternity, and in an exact proportion: and yet it shall be so ordered by the wisdom of God, that various parts of their punishment shall be so timed and placed and circumstanced as to be punishment also of their several acts of pride, or malice and spite against God and against his creatures that are not in a state of punishment.\textsuperscript{154}

The sin of Lucifer and the demons was a never-ending and continually renewed sin, calling for never-ending and continual punishment. Edwards writes,

God brings the punishment of devils upon ‘em for their proud rebellion in heaven this way, by making them the cause of their own torment and vexation to all eternity by their continually renewed acts of pride and spite. He gives them over forever to that same disposition which they exercised when they fell, and by that means makes them forever a procuring their own misery; and this is a misery they are plunged into as a punishment of their first rebellion.\textsuperscript{155}

The demons were punished for “procuring the fall of mankind: God curses the serpent for it.”\textsuperscript{156} Edwards explains, “Satan is wholly disappointed every way of his end in tempting mankind.”\textsuperscript{157} Satan designed, from the very beginning of his fall, to “frustrate God of his end in creating this lower world, to rob [God] of his glory he intended by it to himself and especially to his Son.”\textsuperscript{158} Satan’s “inferior end” was for the purpose of gratifying his own envy in the misery of human beings, but this too was “disappointed, in that what he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} Edwards, “ Miscellanies, No. 296,” in \textit{WJE}, 20:385.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Edwards, “ Miscellanies, No. 258,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:366. Like Edwards, Aquinas taught that demons “remain ever obstinate in their malice” (Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica}, Ia, q. 64, a. 2).
\item \textsuperscript{157} Edwards, “ Miscellanies, No. 344,” in \textit{WJE}, 13:417.
\end{itemize}
has done has been an occasion of a far more exalted degree to the elect of mankind, to all that God intended happiness to in the creation.”

159 Edwards believed that Satan’s end against the glory of God will ultimately contribute more greatly to the glory of God and will be the “occasion of abundance of misery to the devil; he revenges upon himself: it will occasion the brining on the consummation of his punishment at the day of judgment; he does as it were pull it down on his own head.”

160 Edwards looks to the glorious day of judgment of which the devils “tremble at the thought of,” at which time they will be the completing of their punishment for their rebellion in heaven; for when they were cast out of heaven, they were put in prison in chains of darkness till the judgment. And it is also a punishment of what they do against God in the world of mankind. They ben’t punished for these works as subjects are punished by a lord, but as unjust and cruel enemies are punished by a victor.


In his sermon “Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory,” Edwards sees that great and final judgment day as the time of the overthrow of Satan’s kingdom and all his minions. Edwards rejoices in this truth:

This day of God’s overthrowing the visible kingdom of Satan is also called that great day of God almighty. ‘Tis spoken of as a very great day indeed, a wonderful time and doubtless a time greatly calling for preparation. Happy will those be that shall be found prepared for that great day of the overthrow of Antichrist and other enemies of Christ and setting up the kingdom of Christ through the world.
Angels [were created to be] ministering spirits [to the inhabitants of the] lower world [which is] to be the stage of the wonderful Work [of Redemption].1

Jonathan Edwards

Angels play a noticeable role within the theology of the Christian church. In the patristic era, theologians and Christian thinkers were more concerned with *who* the angels are more than they were *what* the angels are. Undoubtedly, each theologian aligned himself with the position of angels being spiritual beings. Inclined to ignore the angelic nature, Augustine thought this subject was so mysterious that this was something which could never be truly comprehended. Chrysostom presented very few remarks vis-à-vis the angelic nature. For all of his postulating regarding the angels as messengers of divine illumination, Pseudo-Dionysius claimed that the nature of the angels within their hierarchical existence requires that they be spiritual beings. Regardless of speculation, angelic relationships prove to be the focus of the patristic writers.

The theologians of the medieval era struggled in their continued individual investigation of the subject of the angelic, since it is a discussion that must orbit around the existence of faith. Peter Lombard laid a rudimentary groundwork, Bonaventure and Aquinas elucidated the complexities of angelic existence, and Biel echoed the formulation of those conclusions. For each of these men, perfection existed in the cosmos if these purely spiritual beings also exist, and it was from this spiritual existence that the manner in which angels related to the other elements and beings of creation could properly be

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explored. Regarding the angelology of the medieval age, the question of who was only able to be answered by first addressing the question of what—relationships of the angelic could only give rise when dictated by angelic nature.

During the Reformation period, Martin Luther established angels as having a fundamental role as archetypes of the Christian life. Because of their all-embracing submission to the will of God, the good angels, according to Luther, had much to teach Christians about the gospel faith and obedience.² In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin assumed a very guarded position on the subject of angels.³ Calvin warns his readers that the subject of the angelic should be approached with a willingness to “remain enclosed within [the] bounds to which God has willed to confine us, and as it were, to pen up our minds that they may not, through their very freedom to wander, go astray.”⁴ For Calvin, the real danger was in the unprofitable speculations about the angelic, but most importantly in the possibility of worshipping the angels. In the decades following the Reformation, English theologians readjusted their belief relating to angels in such a way that they could be utilized unequivocally as a conduit for Reformed ideas. The rediscovery and institution of justification by faith alone, aligned with the eradication of purgatory in theological thought, led to the firm denunciation of the idea that angels serve as intercessors between God and men. However, the initial impact of reform did not entirely destroy older patterns of thought and practice concerning the angelic. Although

³ See Laura Sangha, Angels and Belief in England, 1480-1700 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 41-78, where Calvin is featured as a major influence on the angelology of the time and place. Joad Raymond makes a similar comment in Milton’s Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.
the angelic roles of meditation and intercession were rejected, angels continued to be promoted by reforming clergymen.

The Puritans rarely engaged in what is called “angelology” today.\(^5\) In desiring to cultivate a strictly God-centered worldview, the Puritans carefully and cautiously avoided the magical or mechanical.\(^6\) When the subject of the angelic is encountered within the writings of the Puritans, it is almost never isolated, but serves to emphasize the whole counsel of God as revealed in Scripture. The Puritans approached the subject of angels with great caution choosing to have their thoughts about the angelic operate within a framework of the mediation of Christ alone and the glory of God alone. Isaac Ambrose properly captures the Puritan approach to angels: “We have far less written in God’s word of the nature of angels, than of God himself; because the knowledge of God is far more practical, and less controversial, and more necessary to salvation.”\(^7\)

The angelology of Jonathan Edwards is a vivid recitation and reformation of the understanding of angels passed down to him from all the aforementioned theologies and eras of church history. The framework he posits regarding the angels’ nature, position, and role within the context of the history of redemption underscores the majesty of Christ, the dignity of the human race in God’s sight, the subtlety of God’s providential purposes, and the cosmic context of creaturely salvation.\(^8\) Angels appear throughout the tri-world narrative that Edwards constructs. He drew these themes out of his *Miscellanies*, and included them in his sermons, reminding his congregants that “angels [were created to

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\(^7\) Isaac Ambrose, *War with Devils: Ministration of, and Communion with Angels* (Glasgow, Scotland: Joseph Galbraith and Company, 1769), 480.

be] ministering spirits [to the inhabitants of the] lower world [which is] to be the stage of the wonderful Work [of Redemption].”

Edwards’ reflections on angels and demons repeated much of the same as the traditional orthodoxy Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Puritan theology. The angels were created by God and are bodiless or incorporeal beings. They are intelligent beings who are spectators to God’s work in the universe from the moment of their creation up to the present time. They are moral beings with a capacity to choose both good and evil. They exist in vast numbers and have powers that greatly exceed those of human beings. Some angels fell through sin or disobedience, and these fallen angels are the demons. Satan was once the foremost of the unfallen angels and, after his fall, became the leader and foremost of the demons. The unfallen angels serve as ministers of God’s providence, performing many functions throughout the physical universe and in the lives of human beings.

Yet, Edwards’ account of the angels differs from that of his predecessors on a number of points. Based on his interpretations and inferences from Scripture, Edwards concluded that the angels were not confirmed in grace until long after the world’s creation. In fact, the unfallen angels were unconfirmed in grace and on probation from their creation until the ascension of Christ—truly an inconceivably long period of time as compared with Aquinas’ notion of an instantaneous fall from grace (for the fallen angels) and an equally instantaneous confirmation in grace (for the unfallen angels). What is more, Edwards’ angels were capable of growing in grace and blessedness—a quality that makes them human-like. Unlike the heavenly figures of perfect blessedness that one finds in Thomas Aquinas’ account, Edwards’ angels were directly involved, invested, and interested in human events and affairs. They themselves—even in their unfallen state—were reconciled to God when the Son of God took on a creature’s nature in the Incarnation.

This is one reason that angels rejoiced at Jesus’ birth. In eternity, angels and humans will together make a single holy community in heaven. Edwards did not present the entire story of angels in a single text, but repeatedly returned to the same themes in his *Miscellanies*, and it is from there that we can piece together an interconnected narrative. The story, as Edwards tells it, sweeps from creation through all of history to consummation.

As has been stated, Jonathan Edwards’ Christology played a dominant role in the construction of his angelology and how he viewed the role of angels within redemptive history. For Edwards, the ultimate purpose of God in creating the world was linked with the Incarnation of the Son of God—the joining of the eternal Son with a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Despite a focus on the sufferings and the crucifixion of Christ, Edwards’ reflections on God’s purposes began with the Incarnation. He writes, “It seems to me very proper and suitable, that the human nature should be advanced far above the angelical nature by the incarnation of Christ.”10 The reason for this is that “men are a more ultimate end of the creation than the angels . . . [and] the angels . . . are created for this end, to minister to the creatures.”11 There is a parallel between Christ and the angels at this point. Christ’s divine nature places him inherently higher than all human beings, and yet Christ humbles himself to serve humanity in his earthly life. The angels are also inherently above human beings (though not so high as Christ), yet the angels are called to serve those lower than themselves. In other passages, Edwards develops this idea further with regard to the church’s ministers and eminent saints, who show their excellence by embracing a position of lowliness and servitude.

The angels, for Edwards, were limited beings with only a partial grasp of God’s purposes. Based on his exegesis of certain key biblical texts (especially Eph 3:9-11, Col


1:26, and 1 Cor 2:7-9), Edwards concluded that God’s sweeping plan for cosmic redemption was “a secret that [God] kept within himself, was hid and sealed up in the divine understanding, and never had as yet been divulged to any other.” This means that the angels—though witnessing God’s works in history from the beginning of creation—were not able to understand all the intricacies of God’s redemptive plan.

Edwards believed Lucifer was created to be immensely superior to all the other angels. It was the very excellence, according to Edwards, of Lucifer that became the occasion of his fall from grace. Edwards writes that God, who declared before the foundation of the world his great love for the race of mankind through Christ, “gave the angels the charge of them as ministering spirits to men.” In essence, this event caused the fall of the anointed cherub, Lucifer, and a great number of the other holy angels. Edwards explains that Lucifer could not bear the thought that he was employed to serve and protect those who were hierarchically below him within creation. Because Jesus Christ was fashioned in the likeness of men in his incarnation, the race whom Satan viewed as inferior to his excellence and beauty, the angels could not bear that such a being in human form should ever rule over them, therefore they fell from their original state of grace. Like his other angelology, Edwards frames this argument within the context of his history of redemption and recognizes the fallen angels as having a strategic role in the history of the world and then ultimately explores their demise at the end of the age. Satan’s final defeat and punishment comprehensively demonstrates the power of God. Yet, it also bears witness to the creature’s ultimate capacity for defiance of God and to the mystery of evil itself.

This dissertation has made clear that the angelic host, within the theological understanding of the history of the church, has played a vital role in the Christian


understanding of God’s involvement in creation, the affairs of humanity, and the consummation of history. To dismiss the theology of angels as too mysterious, too speculative, or too mystical, is to discount the intellectual exercise and spiritual reflection of countless Christian thinkers throughout history. Jonathan Edwards serves as an example of the necessity of developing a robust angelology in the sincere hope that attention, theological reflection, and gospel sanctification would be directed, not upon the angels themselves, but upon Christ whom we worship and serve together.


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ABSTRACT

“NOBLES AND BARONS OF THE COURT OF HEAVEN”: A SURVEY OF ANGELOLOGY FROM THE PATRISTIC ERA TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS GIVEN TO JONATHAN EDWARDS

Dustin Wayne Benge, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
Chair: Dr. Michael A.G. Haykin

In the later years of the twentieth century, more than four hundred works were cataloged and published on the subject of angels. While a few of these works are scholarly attempts at understanding angels, most are not. At the turn of the century, great interest arose in the theological writings of Jonathan Edwards. However, with the exception of a few works, the writings of Edwards on the theme of angels have gone virtually unnoticed within the academic and scholarly community. A rediscovery of the contribution of the writings of Jonathan Edwards on the subject of angels propels him as one of the most important intellectuals on the subject in the Christian tradition. For Edwards, the angelic realm is to be investigated and viewed as a corollary to his Christology. Edwards great interest lay in the mission and function of the angels within redemptive history, and at most every point he references angels alongside references to Christ. Edwards’ angelology was traditional in its focus on the three standard medieval themes of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels.

This dissertation sought to remedy this gap within Edwards studies by shaping a theology of angels directly from the Edwards corpus and placing Edwards within a long line of theologians from the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Puritan eras collectively considered this celestial subject. Chapter 1 introduces the void in the literature and sets Jonathan Edwards as a substantial theological voice on the subject of angels. Chapter 2
begins with an examination of patristic angelology with particular emphasis given to Augustine, Chrysostom, and Pseduo-Dionysius. Chapter 3 investigates the angelology of the medieval age with importance given to Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas. Chapter 4 surveys the history of Reformation and Puritan scholarship on the topic of the angelic, by examining the angelology of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Isaac Ambrose, Samuel Willard, Thomas Ridley, and Increase and Cotton Mather. Chapter 5 examines the writings of Jonathan Edwards and constructs a theological framework for his angelology from within the context of his history of redemption. Chapter 6 investigates Edwards’ view on the fall of Lucifer, while seeking to link Edwards to theologians of the past in his views and methodology for considering the subject of angels. Finally, the conclusion offers an overview of angelology from the patristic era to the time of Jonathan Edwards and explores further areas of reading and research on the subject.
VITA

Dustin Wayne Benge

EDUCATION
B.A., Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, 2003
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

MINISTERIAL
Associate Pastor, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama, 2012–2015
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Jackson, Kentucky, 2009–2012

PUBLICATIONS

ORGANIZATIONAL
Evangelical Theological Society