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# THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

(Continued.)

Col. 1, 16: *By Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible.*

In the Creed we confess: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, *Maker of heaven and earth.*" Luther explains these words thus: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures." By the phrase: *heaven and earth* therefore we mean all creatures, visible and invisible. This truth is beautifully set forth in Col. 1, 16. "By Him were all things (*τὰ πάντα*) created." This is a sweeping assertion. "*All things,*" whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, all things that have existence were produced by His creative power. The apostle specifies this comprehensive term *all* by saying: all "that are in heaven, and that are in earth." In whatsoever *place* things may exist, they have been created by Him. A further specification of "all things" is made when the apostle adds: "visible and invisible." Of whatever *nature* the things may be, they are His handiwork. He created the *visible* things, such as the earth with its flora and fauna; the luminaries of heaven: the sun, the moon, the myriads of stars, and, last but not least, man,

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26) *Nat. Quaest.* III, 29. 30.

27) Quoted by Giles, *History of Chinese Literature*. Confucius taught: "The most righteous of men cannot conform to the demands of morality in every part; some fault always remains." (Cited by Bluntschli, *Alt-asiatische Gott- und Welt-Ideen.*)

the crown of creation. He called into being the *invisible* things, by which, according to the context, St. Paul primarily understands the heavenly world of spirits—the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. In short, God “created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that therein are,” Rev. 10, 6. “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made,” John 1, 2.<sup>1)</sup>

### THE GOOD ANGELS.

Hebr. 1, 14: *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

This text gives occasion to speak, 1. of the nature, and 2. of the ministry of the good angels.

1. *Their nature.* They are *spirits*. What is a spirit? This may be clearly seen from the record of that remarkable appearance of the risen Christ, related Luke 24, 36 ff. When the apostles were sitting at supper, with the doors closed through fear of the Jews (John 20, 19), Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst of them, and “they were terrified and affrighted and supposed that they had seen a spirit.” Allaying their fears, the Risen One says: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I

1) The context discloses the fact that the phrase “*by Him*” in Col. 1, 16, as well as in John 1, 2, denotes Christ. So Christ is the Creator of the world. And still we confess in the Creed: “I believe in God the *Father* Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” How is this to be understood? In the words of Dr. Graebner: “Being an *opus ad extra*, the work of creation was performed with the concurrence of the three Persons of the Godhead. It was the *Father* who made the world *by* the *Son*, Hebr. 1, 1. 2, ‘by whom the world was made,’ John 1, 10, ‘and all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible,’ Col. 1, 16. By the ‘Word of the Lord’ were the heavens made; and all the host of them ‘by the Breath of His mouth,’ Ps. 33, 6, *i. e.*, by the Spirit of God, Gen. 1, 2. But while this work is thus attributed to the three Persons in the Godhead, it is not unscriptural to ascribe it, by appropriation, to the First Person, as is done in the Apostles’ Creed, since in the texts already quoted the world is said to have been made *by* the *Son*, *by* the Word of the Lord, and *by* the Breath of His mouth, He who by the Son and the Spirit created the world being the *Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.* Acts 17, 24; coll. v. 31.” (THEOL. QUART., vol. III, p. 5.)

myself: handle me and see; for *a spirit hath not flesh and bones*, as ye see me have." Hence, the angels, being spirits (*πνεύματα*), are incorporeal beings. The supposition that angels possessed a subtile, celestial, material body is refuted by the passage above. Man, consisting of body and soul, is composed of a material and an immaterial element; the angels, however, are simply spirits, without a body or the attributes of material things. Nevertheless they have a personal subsistence; they are *personal* spirits. From our text this truth may be clearly perceived from the fact that they are charged to perform certain tasks—they are *sent forth to minister* unto men. Sadducees, ancient and modern, deny the personal existence of angels; our secular literature, too, is sprinkled with slurs, direct and indirect, at this doctrine; hence the necessity of stressing this truth. Being spirits, the angels are *invisible*. Col. 1, 16 they are enumerated among the *δόξατα*, the invisible beings, created by Christ. The fact that angels now and then assumed visible forms does not subvert this doctrine. When they were made, the Mosaic record does not say. That they were called into being within the six days of creation we know. Gen. 1, 1; 2, 2; Ex. 20, 11.

2. *The ministry of the good angels.* Our text informs us in the first place that the ministry of the good angels is *by divine appointment*. They are "*sent forth*." God sends them forth; His messengers they are. What a glorious truth to contemplate! Here is the multitude of the heavenly host, distinguished into various orders by various names, such as principalities, powers, thrones, dominions, etc., standing in the presence of that great and glorious King, whose throne is in the heavens and whose kingdom ruleth over all, ever ready, ever willing to be *sent forth* to execute His every word. Of the "ten thousand times ten thousand" (Rev. 5, 11) of angels not one is, nor would one be, exempt from the duty of serving God. They are "*all ministering spirits*."

*The objects of their ministry.* They "minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." "*For them,*" *διὰ τοὺς*, on ac-

*count of those*, on behalf of those, for the benefit of those, who are the children of God, heirs of God, Rom. 8, 17; 1 Pet. 1, 2.

The *diakonia*, the service, of the angels is intended especially for the pious. It is true, they are not coworkers of our salvation. It has pleased God to use the ministry of sinful men to preach the Gospel of salvation to sinful men. It was something extraordinary when God in the Holy Night and on that eventful Easter day availed Himself of the ministrations of angels to proclaim the tidings of great joy. Still God, whose will is our salvation, sends forth His messengers to keep and protect us, so that the heirs of salvation may reach the appointed goal.

The character of this ministry is indicated by the words "to minister." To minister means *to serve*. Scriptural examples of the service of angels rendered the pious are numerous. Subsequent passages will give occasion to instance a number of them.

For our *consolation* let us bear in mind that this service is being carried on to-day. The Greek word *ἀποστελλόμενα*, *sent forth*, is the present participle; and indicates the act designated by the verb as being permanent. The ministering servants were sent forth in olden times, they are sent forth at the present time, and they ever will be sent forth to the end of time for them who shall be heirs of salvation.

Matt. 25, 31: *When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.*

When the Son of Man, the once despised Nazarene, returns visibly as the Judge of the world, "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24, 30), a magnificent retinue — *all the holy angels* — will accompany Him. This sublimely beautiful text does not call for a discussion here, but the phrase "*all the holy angels*" may serve to speak, 1. of the term *angel*, 2. of an attribute of the angels (*holy*), and 3. of the number of angels (*all*).

The Hebrew word for *angel* is מַלְאָךְ (maleach); the Greek is ἄγγελος (angelos). Both words etymologically mean *one who is sent, a messenger*. In the Authorized Version the one word מַלְאָךְ is rendered by two English ones, *angel* and *messenger*; the same is true of the Greek word ἄγγελος. According to a count made, based on Young's Analytical Concordance, the Hebrew term מַלְאָךְ is translated 98 times by the word *messenger*, and 107 times by the word *angel*. The Greek ἄγγελος is rendered but seven times by *messenger* (Matt, 10, 11; Mark 1, 2; Luke 7, 24; 7, 27; 9, 52; 2 Cor. 12, 7; James 2, 25); in all other cases *angel* is the word used. The general principle which the Authorized Version seems to have followed was to translate מַלְאָךְ and ἄγγελος by *messenger*, when the concept indicated by the English word was apparent in the original text, and to restrict the use of the word *angel* as much as possible to the στρατιά οὐράνιος, "the heavenly host," Luke 2, 13. From the fact that each of the words, מַלְאָךְ and ἄγγελος, has two renderings, both in English and in German, arises the difference in the translation of some passages of the two versions. Mal. 3, 1: "I will send my messenger." "Ich will meinen Engel senden." — "The messenger of the covenant." "Der Engel des Bundes." Mal. 2, 7: "He is a messenger of the Lord." "Er ist ein Engel des Herrn Zebaoth." Matt. 11, 10: messenger — Engel; Luke 7, 24: messenger — Bote; 7, 27: messenger — Engel; 9, 54: messenger — Bote; 2 Cor. 12, 7: messenger — Engel; James 2, 25: messenger — Engel.

Now, as to the application of the word. No less a person than our *Savior Himself* is called "the Angel of the Covenant," Mal. 3, 1; Matt. 11, 10. He is the Angel κατ' ἐξοχήν, the *uncreated* angel, the messenger sent by God to consummate and announce the covenant of grace between God and man. Besides this, which is the highest application of the word "angel," we find it used of any messenger of God. *John the Baptist* was an *angel* of the Lord, Mal. 3, 1; Luke 2, 27; Mark 1, 2, because he was sent by God with a message to prepare the way of the Lord. *Prophets and preachers* are termed *angels* because of

the message they have of God to proclaim to the people. 2 Chron. 36, 15; Hagg. 1, 13; Rev. 2, 1. 8. 12. 18; Mal. 2, 7. In a still wider sense, the words *Maleach* and *angelos* designate *any-one bearing a message from one to another*. Gen. 32, 3. 6; Numb. 20, 14; 21, 21; 22, 5; Josh. 6, 17. 25; Judges 6, 35; 7, 24; Luke 7, 24; James 2, 25, etc.

But *in its restricted sense*, as it is commonly used and commonly understood, the term *angel* denotes a specific creature, the ministering spirit of Hebr. 1, 14. In this use of the word it is also of importance to remember that the term *angel* is an official name, and indicates the purpose for which the heavenly host was destined, *i. e.*, to be "sent forth," Hebr. 1, 14. "The name angel does not describe the nature of the being, but its office, and signifies 'one sent,' a legate, a messenger. Hence Augustine: 'Do you ask for the name of their *nature*? It is spirit. Do you inquire concerning the name of their *office*? It is angel.'" (Quenstedt.) The particular office, for example, which these heavenly messengers are to perform on that great day of which the text speaks is to "gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other," Matt. 24, 31.

These angels are *holy*, says the text, that is, they are without sin. Scripture speaks of holy men and of holy women; all Christians are holy people. The distinction, however, between the holiness of the angels and that of the believers is this: Christians are holy in the sight of God on account of the righteousness and holiness of their Redeemer which they have put on by faith, Gal. 3, 2; the angels, on the other hand, are holy in themselves, having retained their concreated holiness. Being holy, their will is conformable to the holy will of God.

"All the holy angels" will be with Christ at His Second Coming. How glorious a sight that will be for the believers goes beyond the powers of our imagination. But once before, on the Night of the Nativity, when the Word was made flesh, did the entire heavenly host leave its celestial home to fill the still air on the plains of Bethlehem with a melodious symphony,

such as never again was vouchsafed for men to hear; now again, at His final coming, they *all* will be with Him "with a great sound of a trumpet," Matt. 24, 31. There will be assembled the angels and the archangels, the seraphim and the cherubim, the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Is. 6, 2; Gen. 3, 24; Col. 1, 16; 1 Pet. 3, 22; 1 Thess. 4, 16. A glorious host, indeed, and a great host! There is a certain, fixed number of angels. Being sexless, Matt. 22, 30, the number is not multiplied; being immortal, Luke 20, 36, the number is not decreased. How great the number is we do not know; but we do know that it is vast. "A multitude of the heavenly host" sang the first Christmas anthem, Luke 2, 13; the number of them, says Rev. 5, 11, is "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand of thousands." What a vast assembly! And what a glorious and mighty King must He be who is the Lord of all these hosts!

Matt. 18, 10: *In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

To be admitted to the very presence of an Oriental monarch, to see him face to face, was a distinguished privilege, enjoyed by such only as had gained the special favor and confidence of the king. The queen of Sheba, admiring the wisdom of Solomon, says, "Happy are these thy servants, which are continually before thee." Cf. 2 Kings 25, 19; Jer. 52, 25. How great, then, is the happiness of the angels, these servants of God, who behold the King of kings face to face! To see God face to face, to behold Him as He is, is salvation itself. 1 John 3, 2.

The holy angels are "*in heaven*," where God dwells, hence they are happy, blessed. They "*always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven*," hence *they are always blessed*. This dictum of the Lord excludes the possibility of sinning on the part of the good angels; it teaches their impeccability, and presupposes their confirmation in bliss. In express words their confirmation in bliss is taught Luke 20, 36: "*Neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels.*" Quenstedt



says: "Good angels are so confirmed in the good that, as before they were only able not to sin, now they are altogether unable to sin. Matt. 18, 10; 6, 10; 1 Tim. 5, 21; Luke 20, 36; Gal. 1, 8. . . . Those who are to be blessed in eternal life are called 'equal to the angels.' Now, *we* are sure *we* shall never lose that celestial felicity; therefore, much more are the angels thus assured, to whom we shall be like." (Schmid's *Dogmatics in loco.*) When this confirmation took place, Scripture does not say. It suffices us to know the fact. The dogmaticians give it as their opinion that it occurred after the apostasy of the evil angels, as a reward of grace to the good angels for having remained faithful to God.

Observing the context of the present passage we may also note an *employment* of the holy angels. The text is adduced as a motive for not despising the "little ones." "*Their* angels," *i. e.*, the angels of the "little ones," especially appointed to watch and protect them, "do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." To the tender care of such exalted beings Christ's lambs are committed. How great, therefore, is the dignity with which they are clothed, and how heinous is the sin of putting stumbling blocks in their way! How full of consolation, on the other hand, is not this text for the Christian father and mother, who, filled with anxiety for the welfare of their little ones on account of the dangers that also beset them, can calm their troubled hearts with the firm assurance, God's holy angels are with our little ones. Not a hair can fall from their heads without the will of our Father in heaven.

Ps. 103, 20. 21: *Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure.*

"*Bless the Lord, ye His angels;*" "*bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts.*" Thus the choir invisible is called upon to tune their harps in melodious praise of the Lord Jehovah. We know somewhat of the raptures that encompass the soul when hymns

of jubilee go heavenward in one mighty sweep, but all earthly music pales into insignificance when compared with the majestic hymn of praise of the heavenly choristers with which the dome of the Celestial City continually reverberates: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory," Is. 6, 3. The employment of the angels consists in praising God always. And this song service they perform gladly. Their perfect blessedness, consisting in the beatific vision of God, impels them again and again to break out in strains of music, the "leitmotif," the theme, of which is: "Amen: Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Rev. 7, 11. 12.

When the psalmist says: "*Bless,*" *i. e.*, praise, "*the Lord,*" that is not to be understood "as if they needed any excitement of ours to praise God, they do it continually; but thus he expresses his high thoughts of God as worthy of the adoration of the holy angels; thus he quickens himself and others to the duty, with this consideration, that it is the work of angels." (M. Henry.)

Thus the holy angels praise God continually, and we who have even greater reasons than they to sing the praises of the Lord are so prone to hang our harps upon the willows! *Sursum corda!* "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." Ps. 103, 1 sqq.

But from adoration the angels may at any time be turned to work. "*They do His commandments,*" they "*do His pleasure.*" (Cf. Hebr. 1, 14.) And there are attendants in plenty to do God's behests, there are "*hosts*" of them; and these *hosts*, these *ministers*, are "*His,*" created for His glorification. He, God, is their Lord and Ruler; His every word they cheerfully perform.

Not only are there hosts to do God's word, but they have the ability to carry out every command, they "*excel in strength,*" literally, they are "*mighty in strength,*" heroes in strength. The

angels are created beings, hence they are not omnipotent; God alone is almighty; but their strength is vast. The great slaughter of the firstborn in Egypt, the destruction of the 185,000 of the Assyrian army, each effected by a single angel, are striking proofs of their power.

This great and powerful host is pervaded by but one sentiment—to be willing servants of the Most High. *“They hearken unto the voice of His word.”* They hearken, *i. e.*, they listen intently to catch the first whispered indication of His will. This beautiful imagery indicates the willingness, the eagerness, and the delight with which God’s ministers execute His every word. Contemplating this willing service of the angels, the sigh goes up from the believer’s heart: “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven!”

Ps. 34, 7: *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.*

The Christian’s life is beset with many dangers. His enemies are powerful, Eph. 6, 12. Luther well says: “With might of ours naught can be done, soon were our loss effected.” How consolatory therefore to know that “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.” Viewing this encampment with the eyes of faith, we need not fear. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous. Herod intended to execute Peter. Peter was put in chains and closely watched. Escape seemed impossible. But the Lord sent His angel to deliver him out of the hands of his enemies. Acts 12, 5—10. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego feared the Lord. They would not worship the image of gold set up by Nebuchadnezzar, and hence were cast into a fiery furnace. To his surprise, Nebuchadnezzar saw four men walking in the midst of the fire. The fourth was an angel sent by God to deliver “them that feared Him.” Dan. 3, 6. Daniel feared the Lord. He would not turn idolater at the king’s decree. Though he was cast into the lions’ den, no harm came to him. The Lord sent His angel to shut the lions’ mouth. 2 Kings 6, 17; cf. Gen.

32, 1. Knowing that our path, too, is encompassed with perils manifold, we do well to pray: "Let us this day, and all the remaining time of our mortal life in this vale of tears, be commended to Thy fatherly blessing and divine protection; and may Thy holy angels keep charge over us, that the wicked one may have no power over us."

Ps. 91, 11. 12: *He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

From the text we observe: 1. that the ministry of the angels is by divine appointment. The text says, "*He,*" God, "shall give His angels charge over thee." This fact we noted in Ps. 103, 20. 21. 2. That they are God's servants, carrying out His behests. They are "*His* angels;" cf. Ps. 103, 20. 21; Hebr. 1, 14. 3. That their ministry is intended especially for the pious. The "*thee*" in the text is he who says of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in whom I trust," vv. 2. 9. Cf. Hebr. 1, 14; Ps. 34, 7.

The new matter calling for consideration is the charge committed to the angels, or rather the limitation of the charge: "*To keep thee in all thy ways.*" What does this limitation, "in all thy ways," mean? Whose ways? "*Thy* ways," that is, the ways of the Christian. What are his ways? Those prescribed by the Word of God. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word," Ps. 119, 9. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," Ps. 119, 105. Walking on his way through the wilderness of this world, this lamp, this light of the Word, is to show the Christian the path he can safely tread. Protection through the ministry of the angels is promised him only in so far and inasmuch as he walks on this narrow path; in other words, so long as he leads a godly life. A Christian must not argue, "I am a child of God. My Father will now and then overlook my stepping aside out of the beaten, prescribed path." Forsaking the way of the Lord, he becomes un-

godly. Omit the all-important phrase "*in all thy ways*" from the text, and the devil will quote this Scripture for his purpose, to make people enter on foolhardy enterprises. He did it when making his onslaught on Christ in the wilderness. Matt. 4, 1 sqq. The Savior tells him to expect protection where no promise is given is *tempting* God. The high-diver, the "aeronaut," the "loop-the-looper," and others of that ilk, who perform hazardous feats that tend neither to the glory of God nor to the benefit of man, simply tempt God. They have no promise of divine protection. — What a mighty incentive is this passage to take heed to our way according to God's Word! Ps. 119, 19.

The ministry of the angels is furthermore a *continuous* service. It reads, "In *all thy ways*." Sleeping or waking, at times when there is no apparent danger, or when we are conscious of being in imminent peril, this invisible guard is at our side. We also note the great *carefulness* of their service, which is expressed in the words, "*lest thou dash thy foot against a stone*." Among the many images these words call to our mind is that of a fond mother carefully watching her toddling child, taking his first lessons in walking. There is a stone in the way. That is a great obstacle for that tot. Harm might come to him. That must not be; her child is in danger. So she carefully lifts him in her arms till the danger spot is passed. Thus God acts towards us. We are His children. He says to the angels: Keep them in all their ways! Help them over difficulties; protect them from danger, and be careful about it. Truly, the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous. He careth for us.

From our past experience can we not recall many an escape from impending danger, on land or on sea, many an unexpected assistance?

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

(To be continued.)

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