

# THE ANGELS

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(Excerpted from *My Way of Life*)



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Published by the Rosary Shrine of Saint Jude  
[www.rosaryshrineofstjude.org](http://www.rosaryshrineofstjude.org)

Cover image: St. Thomas Aquinas being taught by angels to contemplate the truth of the Eucharist. San Domenico, Bologna. Photographed by Fr. Lawrence Lew, O.P.

**T**HE CREATURES MOST LIKE GOD, the angels, show forth best the goodness, the majesty, the glory of God; these are His most perfect images, and as the ones to be multiplied with divine extravagance. Heaven and earth are indeed full of His glory. Because the angels are bodiless creatures, pure spirits, it is too often concluded that they are supernatural beings; they are not, God is the only supernatural being. The angels are natural beings, they belong in, and, indeed, dominate our world. They are creatures as natural as oaks, or sunsets, or birds, or men. To call them supernatural because they are not like ourselves is a part of that provincial pride by which a man puts human nature at the peak of the universe, primarily because he himself is a man.

**T**O PRETEND THEY DO NOT EXIST because we do not see them is like pretending that we never caught ourselves asleep. There would be much more sense in the angels exiling us from the world of nature on the basis of a majority vote. We have no monopoly on nature, not even on free will and intellectual knowledge in nature; we have big brothers far outstripping our puny powers, yet nonetheless brothers, a part and parcel of the created world that is so truly ours.

**S**EEING OURSELVES from the plant or animal level, we can with reason marvel at the nobility of men; if the animals were capable of such things, they would see us as godlike creatures. Looking up at the angels from our level, we promptly shrink to our proper proportions; of all the created world, we have the least, the most earthbound, the feeblest of all created intelligence and love. Lest that be too humiliating, we can reflect that somewhat the same is true of the angels; seen from our level, they are creatures so wondrous as to make men doubt their very existence; but seen from the heights of God they are so inadequate an image of His splendor as to be insignificant in comparison with the Infinite.

**I**T WAS NO TRICK to fill the heavens with a heavenly host on the first Christmas night. The stars that sparkle on the body of night are

a mere handful of jewels compared to the numbers of the angels. The prophet Daniel gives only a hint of their number when he says: “Thousands of thousands ministered to Him and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him.” Dionysius humbly confesses: “There are many blessed armies of the heavenly intelligences, surpassing the weak and limited reckoning of our material numbers.” All the men in the world at any time are a handful, a scattered gathering easily lost sight of in the myriads of pure spirits who most perfectly image the Creator of both men and angels.

**V**ARIETY IS DEAR TO US, as it should be for it is dear to God. We appreciate changing seasons, the differences of trees, flowers, animals; and we are particularly grateful that all men and women do not look exactly alike. We like change and differences, not because we are fickle, or just for the sake of change, but because no one moment, no one climate, no one expression of beauty or goodness exhausts the possibilities of reflection of the divine perfection. There are so many pleasing combinations of human creatures, so many pleasing patterns of human virtue, so many pleasing colors, sights, sounds; such inexhaustible aspects of truth, so many alluring insights into goodness. The variety of the world is at one and the same time a declaration of the imperfection of created things, each one giving us only so much, and of the extravagant generosity of God.

**A**S IN NUMBERS, so in variety, the angelic world is a splendor that dims the variety of the physical world into a plainness approaching homely monotony. There are no angelic families or races; each individual angel stands apart from all others more distinctly different than an elephant from a fly. The pleasant individual differences we notice from man to man and woman to woman are as far from the differences between the angels as a ripple on a pond is from the towering power and smashing violence of a stormy sea. At each encounter in the heavenly courts, the angels see differences greater than those which distinguish a rose from a woman. Multiply this by the countless numbers of the angels; the heavenly choirs are a luminous image of divinity’s perfec-

tions stupendous in its beauty, staggering in its wide variety. Yet all this is no more than a foggy outline of the beauty of God.

**O**NCE CREATED, the angels live forever, depending, as we do, on the steady support of the hand of God but on nothing else. All the things that pertain to us because we have bodies have no place in the angelic world: growth, nourishment, sickness, pain, the decline of old age, and ultimately death. They are so much more like God than we are that their whole being reflects something of the divine eternity, immortality, independence. Angels are neither old or young, sick or healthy, men or women, infants or ancients, tall or short, fat or thin; they are the bright flames of life, unflickering, unfading, indestructible flames that are fed by nothing but God.

**T**HE PRINCELY DIGNITY of Gabriel standing before Our Land, the easy competence of Raphael protecting the young Tobias, the majesty of Michael with his flaming sword guarding the gates of a lost paradise gives us some little vision of the nobility of the angels. We are in danger of blinding ourselves to that vision if we forget that these were angels stooping to our limitations, bowing to our penchant for thinking in pictures; thoughtful angels who delight us as a mother delights her infant by imitating its gurgling and chuckling. This is not a mother's normal speech; nor is this the angel's normal appearance.

**A**NGELS WERE NOT MADE TO GIVE LIFE to bodies as were our human souls. The bodies in which they have appeared from time to time among us were the appearance of bodies taken on for our comfort; not real, but apparent that we might the more easily accept the angel, his message, his companionship. None of the things that are proper to living bodies could be accomplished by these apparent bodies of the angels: they could not digest a meal, beget children, become tired, or wake refreshed from sleep. For us to lose our body is the tragic thing called death; the body belongs to our integrity, without it we are not men or women but disembodied souls, we are only half

ourselves. It is hard for us not to feel a little sorry for the angels' lack of bodies, forgetting that if the impossible thing happened and an angel had a real body, it would not be benefited but debased by that fact. Its completely spiritual nature in its independence and power has no need of a body. It can get far more done than any strong man, indeed than any material force. It is free from the barriers that the physical inevitably imposes on our knowledge and our love: free from the sluggishness, fatigue and distraction that makes our lifetime harvest of truth so skimpy; free from the frustration inherent in all our loving gestures of union, of all the feeble faith that supports our love, of all the helplessness that is our love's bitterest fruit.

**N**OT EVEN A CHILD is puzzled about how an angel gets its clothes on over such huge wings; for it is clear to everyone that the wings we give to angels are a symbol and nothing more. The swift flight of a bird contrasted with the trudging step of a man is a fitting symbol of smooth, untrammelled, rapid movement, and so a centuries-old expression of the celerity of angelic passage. In our own times, we might appeal to the soundless swoop of a diving jet plane to help our stumbling minds to follow the flight of an angel; we would come closer to reality by following with a flick of the eye the almost instantaneous thrust of lightning. We have the most accurate measurement of that angelic progress in the time it takes our own minds to jump from city to city, across oceans, over five, ten, or fifty years; for it is thus that an angel moves.

**I**N OUR THINKING about the angels, we must draw much more on our knowledge of God than on our knowledge of men, for the angels are finite pure spirits modeled on the infinite Pure Spirit. We do not locate God by surrounding Him, He is not contained within the easily discerned outlines of a body, a town, a country; He is where He works, and so is everywhere, for nothing can continue to be unless it is supported by His omnipotence. Nor can we locate an angel by surrounding it; it, too, is a pure spirit. To ask where an angel is means to ask where it is working; only thus is an angel in place. Obviously



no place can be too small for an angel, no place too big, no place too distant; for with the angels, it is not a question of squeezing a body into uncomfortable quarter, of spreading its arms wide to cover more territory, or of easing it out of a town quietly. No angel is everywhere, for no angel is God, no angel is omnipotent; but neither is an angel human, to be circumscribed by the length of its arms or the horizons of eyes. It is pure spirit, to be limited in place only by the degree of the power and perfection proper to the nature given it by God.

**T**HERE IS A FASCINATION for us in thinking of the angels, a fascination that springs from the fact that a healthy mind welcomes nourishing truth as enthusiastically as a healthy stomach welcomes a hearty meal; with the difference that there is no such thing as a stuffed mind. The more of truth we learn, the hungrier we get, though the happier and more satisfied we are. These angelic big brothers of ours have much for our learning: much of God, whose closest image they are; and much of ourselves, to deflate our pride and stimulate our humility as we learn from them now dim a light marks out our path and now wavering a heart supports our love. But to learn any of the lessons there to be learned, we must remember that angels are not God, neither are they men.

**G**OD KNOWS HIMSELF PERFECTLY, and knowing Himself knows all else. We never do know ourselves directly, we learn of ourselves, like any outsider, from the things we do; and our conclusions usually contain a good margin of flattering error. The angels, like God, do know themselves directly; like us, they know nothing else from knowing themselves for, like us, they are not the source of creatures but part of the family of creation. Divinity is the Creditor of the angels as of us; from the infinite intellect which God is, they too borrow a limited intelligence and hold it on the terms of God. Though the amount of their loan is so very much greater, it is as true of angels as of us that they have limited intellects, they are not intelligence itself. We walk through our days with the impact of the world beating on our senses like a pelting rain. From this downpour, properly filtered, we

quench our mind's thirst though it is dangerous business; for the same flood furnishes us with all the risks of deception from the wandering phantasms that take over so completely in the dreamers or the insane. God and the angels live their eternal lives in perpetually sunny weather, with never a drop of this rain falling into their world. As Gregory has it: "Man senses with the brutes, and understands with the angels."

**W**E ARE VAGRANT PROSPECTORS searching the world for effortless strikes that will give nuggets of truth, but actually subsisting on the flakes and dust that make up our usual find. We spend our lives in laborious attempts at a piecemeal assembly of the pattern of truth from the shattered fragments that fill the world about us. Men search the earth for their knowledge, for we are close to the earth; for the source of the angels' knowledge we must look not to earth but to God, for angels are close to God. As creatures less than the angels sprang from the mind of God into the physical world, from that same divine source, they sprang into the knowledge of the angels.

**T**HE ANGELS' KNOWLEDGE, then, is all that ours is not: accurate, complete, absolutely firsthand, coming to them directly from First Truth itself. All this, not by way of a special gift but by natural right; by the very fact of their purely spiritual nature, their proper way of knowing is by ideas infused into their minds by God. As the years roll by, we may become learned, or even wise; but our knowledge and wisdom are the products of the years and of our labors with many a weed harvested along with the good grain of truth. The angel has all his knowledge in the first instant of his life; whenever, through all his ageless career, an angel uses any one of those infused ideas there is no laborious thinking involved. The thought of an angel, swifter than light, deeper than a sword thrust to the heart, an intuitive plunging to the very depths of truth, leaves no room for doubts, for error, for indecision.

**W**E, WHO ACHIEVE OUR LITTLE WISDOM so painfully, are



decidedly interested parties in any discussion of the mind of the angels. They are our only intellectual relatives in the whole of creation, relatives who have millions to match our intellectual pennies, and there is no possible threat to their great wealth. Moreover, we do not stand afar off in poverty's frustration at the walls of snobbery or the great distances of social strata; these intellectual brothers of ours slip in and out of our days with an ease and intimacy unknown to the most loved members of our immediate family. We should know more about them; and, almost instinctively, we want to know more about them not only because they can do so much for us or against us but also because they are all so very close to us and to our living.

**S**OME OF THEM ARE FRIENDLY with that staunch friendship that endures, even heightens, throughout our weaknesses, our failures, our pettiness, our positive malice; so friendly as to be on guard for us twenty-four hours in the day. It is good to know the powers of such friends, good for our courage, for our hopes, for our loneliness, for our self-respect. Other angels are relentlessly hostile, fired with a hate we did nothing to generate and which we can not dissipate by apology or appeasement. They will stop at nothing less than our total destruction, and even that will not satisfy but rather intensify their hate. In sheer self-defense, we cannot disregard the information possessed by such an enemy.

**W**E MAY BE ONLY MILDLY INTERESTED in the fact that an angel knows itself immediately and perfectly, that, seeing itself as the divine image, it knows God, and that it has complete and intimate knowledge of other angels; though by this we miss all the implications for our own humility, the substantiation of our dreams, and the inherent frustration of our love's desire to know all. but we must come up sharply alert at the angels' knowledge of this physical world of ours. In that regard, they approach closest of all creation to the instant, omniscient comprehension of God. They know the details of the physical world, not through the often murky filter of sense and imagination but directly, without possibility of incompleteness but directly, without

possibility of incompleteness or distortion. They know the world, all of it, not in the blurred fashion of a dilettante's surface expertness, nor in the vague general way of a mind that is just too tired to keep its hold on details, but sharply, concretely, with firm mastery. They know, in other words, more about all the things we have so laboriously studied through the centuries, and know them better than we ever will however more centuries are at the service of the labors of the minds of men.

**A**BOUT OURSELVES, THE ANGELS KNOW ALL there is to be known from the post of an observer who needs no relief, misses nothing, forgets nothing. Beyond that, the angels, all of them, easily penetrate into the regions of our imagination and memory, areas about which the human observer can only guess; which means that our day-dreams are not purely private affairs, they are shared by the whole of the angelic world, our sentimental journeys into the dear days of long ago are never solitary trips. We are not nearly so much alone as we imagine, whatever the hour or place. In relation to the friendly angels, this is to our infinite comfort, and often enough to our acute embarrassment; while it brings home clearly our weak defenses against the hostile hordes of devils, the help we unwittingly and constantly give to our bitter enemies, and our own desperate need for help from powers on a par with these enemies who so completely outmatch us.

**T**HE ANGELS CAN INTRODUCE PICTURES into our imagination, they can reach into the storehouse of memory and parade the past before our mind's eye; but there the great natural powers of the angelic world grind to a halt before the impregnable sovereignty of our intellect and our will. Not even the highest of the angels knows what a man is going to do next; the most gifted of the angels cannot know what I am thinking at this moment. In this privacy of soul, we are the equals of the angels; this territory is inviolable to all but almighty God Himself. Such is the stature of man's dignity. We are spiritual as well as physical; we are free; our intellect and will are not to be tampered with by any created force. So our thoughts, our deliberate desires, our loves are our own; for them we ourselves must take full credit or full

blame. The angels can suggest through imagination and memory, they can coax, entice, threaten, or frighten through these avenues of our sense nature; but we are the ultimate masters in command of our lives.

**B**OTH ANGELS AND MEN BOW DOWN in humble union in matters of faith. Here every truth is God's secret not to be discovered by anyone less than God, not to be known unless God Himself make the truth known. That divine life can be and is shared, that heaven's welcome waits for those who welcomed God, that hell's misery confirms the sinner's choice, that the Son of Mary is also the Son of God, that the living Christ is present in the Eucharist, Calvary renewed in the Mass, that grace pours into the soul through the sacraments - all these the angels know only as we do: by believing them on the word of God. Angels are a part of nature, as we are; their powers are natural powers. What they have of the supernatural, whether it be life, truth, action, or goal, is theirs only through the boundless generosity of the only supernatural Being, God Himself.

**J**UST AS IN US, THE SWEEP OF KNOWLEDGE marks out the horizons of love, so in the angels, to match that superb knowledge, second only to God's, there is a driving power of appetite that comes closer than anything else in creation to imaging the power, the intensity, the constancy and finality of the divine will. Knowing a little, we can love a little; loving a little, we insist on knowing more of that lovable-ness; knowing more, we love more and insist again on more knowledge that there might be more love. The heart never actually outruns the head, for we have to see to love and the heart has no eyes. To know something of the magnificent perfection of angelic knowledge is to prepare oneself for the breathless rush of angelic love.

**T**HE ANGELS ARE NOT DRIVEN to their activity by a knowledge outside themselves, directed by another intelligence, as are the plants; they are not caught up necessarily in the immediate appeal of this or that particular good, as are the animals. Rather, like us, they are

free agents; their love is their own. They can take or leave any good that creation has to offer. The explanation is roughly paralleled in our capacity for vision. Our eyes can see the brown, black, purple, blue, violet and all the rest precisely because they are not determined to any one of these things but to color in general, any color, all colors; if they were made only for brown, they would see nothing else. Our wills, and those of the angels, are not fixed to any one good, but to good, any good, all goods, even the infinite good; and so our wills and theirs can reach out to any good, or they can reject any good save goodness itself seen nakedly in the vision of God.

**B**UT ANGELS ARE CREATURES, they are not God. Like ourselves, they cannot rest content within themselves without excluding happiness and making a home for misery. Like ourselves, they must reach outside themselves for the lovableness that will still the insistent demands of the will. God is totally sufficient unto Himself, for only God is infinite goodness, only God has no end to attain but only goodness to share. Only God is home for the love of the angels, as He is for our love; they too must make their way home or remain forever exiles, wanderers in a world as empty and cold as a prison cell, for love's fire is the divine flame or it gives no warmth.

**T**O THE APPRECIATION OF OUR NOBILITY be it said that the angels are no more free than the least of men. Liberty does not come in spoonfuls, it is not doled out in differing degrees; it is magnificently full or it is non-existent. We are, then, no less responsible than the highest angels for the use we make of that liberty; and it is this awful splendor of responsibility that frightens men into an attempt to deny their humanity. The record of our use of it gives us grounds primarily for humility, since we are so often wavering, weak, timid both in our virtues and our sins. The angels suffer no such imperfections: their virtues are gestures of sweeping grandeur, their sins plumb the depths of the malice of hell. The movement of their wills, in other words, is a worthy complement to the instantaneous perfection of their knowledge.

**I**T IS AN AWESOME THING to be loved or hated by an angel; one hardly less overpowering than the other. Nothing will arise to change that love or hate, there will be no belated discovery of goodness or evil, no error of judgement to be corrected, no rival to detract from the totality of love's embrace or hatred's spleen. The angel loves or hates instantaneously, with all the intensity of its unimpeded nature, irrevocably, with utter generosity or malice, in a roaring flame of consummation of its desire. This is the way we think of our love in its springtime vigor, the way we dream of love in its perfection; but we know in the depths of our hearts that only God can make it come true in us, and we are astounded that even God can work such a wonder within us. We are so easily afraid of utterly final surrender, so aghast at reckless gallantry, so cautious in giving, so demanding of gifts.

**T**HE ANGELS' LOVE AND HATE suffer no limitations from physical causes, the limits that are perpetually insisted on in us by our bodies. We can be terribly angry, but for just so long: new joys can dim the sorrow that provoked anger, new sorrows swamp the old in their magnitude, old joys come back to dim the memory of injury; or we just get too tired by the violence of anger to seek the revenge it demands. Our love suffers the same distractions, the same rivals, the same opposites, and even the same fatigue. There are no such passions in the angels, for they are pure spirits, unencumbered by anything of the physical; in them there are only those corresponding movements of the will for which we have no other names than the tags we have put on the movements of passion: love, hate, desire, aversion, joy, sorrow and all the rest. Clearly, the fury of a devil far surpasses the anger of the loudest, most violent, most vicious of men; quite aside from its superior intensity and wholeheartedness, there need be no lessening of it, no end to it, indeed it is certain that it will never be less consecrated to destruction than in its first moment. So too the love of an angel reduces the breathless wonders of our love's first moments to the echo of a whisper, to a light dimmer than a candle's light in the heart of the sun.

**T**HERE IS LOVE AND HATE in the world of the angels, love and hate that separates angels into the world of heaven and the world of hell, bringing home to us the humbling lesson that even the greatest of God's creatures can fail, it is only God who cannot. There is among the angels an evil love which was the undoing of the very best, the most perfect of them, a love that was hatred of self by its very refusal to look beyond the staggering beauty that was God's gift to the angels. That hating self-love gave birth to unremitting hatred of God, the Giver of the gifts that so blinded the vision of these evil angels; a hatred of their fellow angels who saw beyond the gift to the splendor of the Giver; and a hatred of men and of all things God had made. There is in the world of the angels a glorious love, an utterly unselfish love that ushered angels into the family of God and the life of heaven for all eternity, the love that fulfilled even angelic desires and completed their imagining of the magnificence of the Godhead.

**T**HE WORLD OF THE ANGELS was not always so rent asunder by the brutal violence of sin. From all eternity, and beyond all time, the intense life of the Trinity filled up the infinite measure of the Godhead before ever there was a creature to image that boundless perfection. When, in God's generosity, the time came to share that goodness, God mad the world; all of it, not a part here and a part there, but all of it, the angels along with the rest of creatures. As they came from the hand of God in that bright morning of the world, the angels were as clean as a dawn at sea; sin was an unknown stranger in a world that God looked upon and saw that it was good.

**I**NDEED IT WAS GOOD, superbly good, divinely good, and of its very best in its angelic details. The creative word of God brought the angels into being free of all spot or taint, with innocence as deep in their nature as it is obvious on the face of a sleeping child; they were perfect, with absolutely no defect. Consequently, that means that in the first instant of their lives, the angels' minds were fully possessed



of all their natural knowledge, their love instantly went forth to wrap itself about all that was good; they were from the very first moment of their lives, in full possession of natural happiness, with nothing lacking, nothing to fight against, nothing to labor for, no steps to be taken. This was the springtime of the world, and never since has spring matched the exuberant joy of this first blossoming.

**W**ITHIN THE LIMITS OF NATURE, there was nothing more that could be given to the angels; natural resources had been tapped to their utmost natural capacities for happiness had been exhausted, natural joy could not bear the slightest increase. But God, who made nature, is not imprisoned by His creation, He is not held within natural limits. All that for the generosity of God. Divine wisdom devised a natural happiness, to give a share in the life, the action, and the goal of God. For the angels, that same first instant of fullest natural happiness was also the first instant of their supernatural life; they were created in sanctifying grace.

**O**N THIS LEVEL OF DIVINE LIFE, there was indeed much still to be had, there were steps to be taken, a goal to be won. By this gift of shared divine life, the angels faced the terrific risks of virtue and vice, of merit and demerit, of heaven and hell; for heaven is natural only to God Himself. To all the rest of us, angels included, the glory of heaven is the final fruit of the seed of grace, the reward to be merited by our own actions flowing from the life-giving principle of grace. It does not belong to us, it is not thrust upon us, but by the kindness of God it can be had for the taking. The angels had the same terrifying responsibility of a final choice between heaven and hell, between God and creatures; not all of them chose well.

**T**HE NATURAL HAPPINESS OF ALL THE ANGELS was a possession impregnably secure; if they had been created in glory, it would have been impossible for them to lose heaven. The goodness and beauty of God, once seen face to face, suffers no rival, it cannot

be rejected; and it is only by a creature's deliberate rejection that God can be lost. Some of the angels, we know, did reject God. Like us, all of them had the gift of grace and with it the divine virtues of faith, hope and charity; these were the instruments by which they were to build their eternal mansions in heaven. Without them, they would be utterly helpless to advance towards God, as would we; with them they could know God as He knows Himself, love Him as He loves Himself, and walk confidently home in the strength of His strength. The point is that they faced a moment of trial and assumed full responsibility for the outcome of that trial.

**I**T NEED ONLY HAVE BEEN A MOMENT. Unlike us, there was no necessity in the angels for the long period of trial that makes heaven so uncertain to our flickering strength. We fall and, by the grace of God, rise again only to find our stumbling hearts tripping us up again; perhaps the greatest splendor of our long fight comes from the unyielding courage that is willing to try again and again despite the testimony of the years to the feebleness of our defenses. The angels suffer none of the obscurity of ignorance, none of the violence of passion, none of the inconstancy of will which so weaken our strongest efforts. In them, as in us, grace is the perfection of nature; their supernatural life is the story of the divine perfection of their natural powers. Their supernatural love then is too an instantaneous, complete, irrevocable embrace. For them one act of charity is decisive for all eternity; there is no dallying by the angels in the face of a choice of heaven. In that one instant, the time of their trial was over; one instant marked the end of their merit; in one blinding flash of love, their place in heaven was fixed forever.

**P**ROBABLY THE PATTERN of supernatural splendor in the angelic world parallels the natural, though this is guessing at the gifts of God; the lowest angel could, receiving greater gifts of grace, easily surpass the Seraphim. But since each of the good angels rushed to the embrace of God unhindered and with all the intensity of its being, it can be reasonably supposed that the divine design matched the splen-

did variety of the angelic natures with proportionate perfections of the divine life of grace. Here there would be no question of laggards and enthusiasts; according to the degree of grace given, each angel, with the full fury of its nature, rushed wholeheartedly to the welcome of God or, in the same kind of headlong plunge, spurned Him utterly to concentrate wholly on itself and so to destroy itself.

**T**HE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS SINGLE MOMENT of trial of the angels are staggering. There is no such thing as a second chance for an angel, no period of contrition and penance. Their freedom from ignorance and passion, their instantaneous grasp of truth removes all possibility of a change of will for them. They love or hate at once and beyond recall; as fixed by that instant as we are by death. When the moment had passed, the sinless angels were securely at home with God, and forever sinless. God, once seen, shrinks all rivals to their proper insignificance. It is not only true that the angels will not sin, they cannot sin now that heaven has been attained; and in that very impossibility they are most wholly free. To choose what defeats the deepest desires of the will, to turn from goodness to evil, is not liberty but its abuse; a truth that needs no argument for the sinner as he writhes in the chains his sins have forged for him yet goes in shamed disgust to sin again.

**T**HE EVIL ANGELS, in that first instant of their abuse of liberty, rejected God. Caught in a deliberate fascination of their own beauty, they refused to look to that beauty's source, refused to seek for happiness outside their own beauty, refused to seek for happiness outside their own satisfying self; and so attempted to find in themselves what can be found only in God - the answer to the will's divinely given desire for goodness without limit. These devils can now sin all they like, and know themselves less free with every sin; the abuse of liberty mounts with each sin, the chains grow more galling, the self-imposed slavery more bitter, and the hatred more consumingly intense. Their choice was freely made, abusing liberty; and it is eternally confirmed to make up hell's most despairing torment.

UNKEMPTNESS IS A COMMON NOTE OF ALL SINS; they are all born in disorder, rollick through disheveled days, to a climax of shabby disintegration that can no longer keep up the pretense of self-respect. Dirt and decay are steadily more familiar companions from which only darkness gives a momentary escape in forgetfulness. This unkempt note is particularly evident in the sin of the angels, not only because disorder is in such marked contrast to that superbly ordered world, but fundamentally because the angels face the psychological impossibility of choosing evil. They cannot make the fatal error of seeing good where none exists, and so taking evil their hearts. To sin at all, the angel has to take an embraceable good, but in a disorderly fashion, with a deliberate uprooting of that loved good from its proper place. It is no exaggeration to say that the bad angels introduced chaos into the divine neatness of the universe, and that darkness and disarray are the atmosphere of hell.

TO EXCLUDE EVIL as a possible choice of angelic sin seems to limit the angelic horizons of sin extremely. Actually the limits are much narrower than this would indicate. None of the wide fields of sin opened up by the seductiveness, fear, or violence of the passions were possible to the angels; as pure spirits, without bodies, the appeal of the senses which is passion's domain is outside the world of the angels. The only avenues of rebellion for them were the purely spiritual ones of pride and envy. When we stop to realize that only a fool is envious of a good infinitely beyond his reach, we see that the angels would sin by pride or they would not sin at all. Surely they had much to be proud of, and there was more reason for pride as the scale of angelic perfection soared to the highest of the Seraphim. The very perfection of the angels, in other words, exposed them to the constant danger of the gifted, the danger of enchantment with the splendor of the gifts to the denial of the Giver.

GRANTED THAT FIRST SIN OF PRIDE in the angels, envy is ceaselessly busy in all directions. Pride hurled them down, and in their fall they passed rank after rank of less perfect angels, down past the

best of men, beneath the feeblest infant barely clinging to life, even below the most hardened sinner who still has the breath of life in him. All these are still recipients of the gifts of God; all of them have heaven either in their grasp or still within their reach; yet all of them are so much less than what these angels could once have been.

**T**HAT A MERE MAN, the lowest of intellectual creatures and so far beneath the devils in natural gifts, should, by the grace of God, go beyond the limits of nature to eternal life in the home of God is galling to the devil and a constant prod to his envy. That this particular soul should reach such heights triumphing over Satan's diabolic genius is a bitter humiliation and added fuel to the fire of his hatred of God. Both that envy and hatred are fed by the devil's disgust with the sins of men. True, he knows that he is guilty of all sins he induces men to commit; but that guilt is a far cry from any affection for things that so easily enslave a man. A man surrendering to the allure or violence of passion, immersing himself in the world of sense, playing the slave to things designed to serve him - all this is revolting to the devil's purely spiritual nature even when he is playing the principal part in bringing about such a degradation of a man. His utter disgust with the depths to which man can sink is still more reason for his envy that such creatures can still aspire to heaven while Satan himself must grovel eternally in hell.

**A**LL THESE GROUNDS for envy and hatred would hold if only the least of the angels had sinned. According to the probable view of theologians, we must start not with the least but with the greatest of the angels in reading the story of evil. It was Lucifer, the highest of the Seraphim, the most perfect image of God in all creation, who took the road of pride to eternal misery. By his example and exhortation, some of every angelic hierarchy joined him in the self-sufficiency that would exclude God. Not that there was a rousing campaign for evil in the angelic courts. Time is our burden, it is for us to deliberate and proceed by argument. The angelic sin was an affair of a moment, enduring eternally, with a leadership of brilliant intelligence. Our Lord has told

us of the “everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels,” indicating a leadership in hell. “The order of divine justice,” says St. Thomas, “exacts that whosoever consents to another’s evil suggestion, shall be subjected to him in his punishments; according to II Pet. 2/19: ‘By whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is the slave.’” The greatest creature God created spurned his Creator; those who followed him are his slaves, not catering to his comfort but augmenting his misery.

**B**Y FAR THE GREATER PART of the angels won their way to heaven; for the rejection of God is too violent a perversion of nature to achieve a whole-sale victory without such allies as ignorance and passion. It is a different matter with us. We grow up so reluctantly, so easily slip back into the irresponsibilities of immaturity; and all our sins have an air of the immature, the incomplete, the underdone about them. We start all our actions from the senses. Stopping at that starting point, refusing the labor and responsibility of going beyond that to the strong domain of reason, is the general story of most of men’s sins. Because it is so much easier to start a thing than to finish it, much of men’s lives never get beyond the level of the senses; so sin is easily common to the majority of men, but a shocking exception in the world of the angels.

**T**HERE ARE DEVILS ENOUGH to make the working out of our salvation a task to be approached in fear and trembling. These are enemies from whom we can expect no quarter. Hatred has put the full force of the splendid perfection of angelic nature to work for our destruction, for the sin of the angels took nothing away from their natural perfection. They still have that encompassing knowledge; that power to affect and penetrate our senses, our memory, our imagination; that movement swift as thought; that ageless experience; that unwearying vitality, that shrewd intelligence so far above our own. What they have lost only serves to make them more dangerous enemies, for it is the supernatural that has been stripped from them: the supernatural love with its blossoms of peace, joy, mercy, kindness; the super-



natural knowledge of the mysteries of faith with its revelation of the nobility of man in the light of the splendor of God; the supernatural hope that keeps despair, and all its collapse of the defenses of virtue, safely at bay. Only the mercy of God restrains the violence of the devil's hate of us.

**T**HERE IS NOTHING OF JOY in the devil's enduring natural perfection. Take the matter of his great knowledge as an example. There is no happiness in a creature's grasp of what is on its own level or beneath it; that happiness is to be found only in reaching to what is above the creature. With ourselves, this is clear, though the embrace of the opposite error is a modern tragedy on a huge scale. The fact remains that there is no more than a passing exhilaration in our knowledge of the details of the world about us; there is a more lasting satisfaction in what knowledge we can gather of the angels, for they are above us in the scale of perfection. But it is only in our knowledge and love of God that we can rest; at every other level, we must substitute the pursuit for the goal to ease the gnawing discontent of our empty hearts and heads. For the devils, there is no happiness in their profound knowledge of men and of the world. None of these is above them, and they have forever excluded God.

**J**OY IS A STRANGER TO HELL, not because it primly avoids so evil a place but because, paradoxically, the miserable in hell will not tolerate its presence. All the inhabitants of the infernal regions are there by their own free choice; and the essential step in the process of gaining admission there was the deliberate exclusion of the sources of joy. There is a kind of sorrow that, too, is barred from hell by unanimous agreement. It is the sorrow unknown to the innocent and impossible to the damned, the sorrow that pours its bitter waters over our soul to kill every least sprig of joy and make a desert waste out of our hearts; yet if the flood be deep enough, it will deposit new, rich soil for an even more abundant growth. This is the sorrow of remorse, the sorrow for the guilt of the sins we have committed. That guilt turns all the world gray and changes every ordinary source of joy into an escape

route for the impossible flight from ourselves. If we are sorry enough, sorry to the length of perfect contrition, the sun shines again and joy beats at our hearts for the smiling welcome which is its right. We can be forgiven and guilt can be destroyed. There is no such prospect on any of the horizons of hell.

**T**HE SORROW THAT RULES THE SKIES OF HELL is hopeless, despairing, as cold and barren as a leaden sky in November. The sorrow that belongs in hell is a sorrow for punishment, not a sorrow for guilt. The devils are bitterly sorry that happiness is forever lost to them, bitterly resentful of the limitations that punishment places on their angelic natures. There is nothing they can do about remedying that sorrow; indeed, there is a violent rejection of the very notion of doing the only thing that would remedy such sorrow - contrition, repentance of the sins that brought it about. Their bitterness turns penetratingly on themselves, leaving them without even that small, fictitious comfort of putting the blame on someone else.

**W**E THINK OF THE DEVILS as being in hell, and so we should, for that is where they belong because of the guilt that destroyed God's life within them. But there is another count on which the devils, some of them, are to be found not in hell but wandering the earth; that is the divinely ingenious purpose of exercising men in virtue. Even by their sin the devils did not become altogether useless in the working out of the purposes of the universe. It is God's wise and universal plan that inferiors be led to their perfection by their superiors; that responsibility rests on the whole angelic world and is accomplished directly and joyfully by the good angels leading men to God, indirectly and in spite of themselves by the bad angels in their testing, and strengthening by that exercise, of the virtues of men. It is a further humiliation to these sinfully proud spirits, that they should be reduced to little more than exercise boys to the conditioning of the race they so envy and for which they have the utmost disgust.

**T**HE DEVILS IN THE WORLD are by no means on vacation from hell. Whenever they are, that fundamental and unending sorrow of hell which consists in the loss of God is their close companion. Wherever they are, they are keenly aware that the humiliation of a spirit's limitation by so material a thing as fire awaits them; the infernal fence of fire that supernaturally marks the narrow boundaries of their eternal cell is as galling a memory and a forecast on earth as it is an actuality in hell itself.