

Week Two Readings: What Do Angels Do?

All readings from the book *Heaven and Hell*, unless otherwise indicated

403. On the basis of an opinion formed in the world, some spirits have believed that heavenly happiness consisted of a life of leisure, being waited on by others; but they were informed that there is never any happiness in idling around in order to be content. This would mean wanting the happiness of others for oneself, in which case no one would have any at all. This kind of life would be idle, not active, a life that would lead to atrophy. They might in fact have known that apart from an active life, a life has no happiness, and that idleness serves that life only for refreshment, in order to return them to the active life with more energy. Then they were shown in many ways that angelic life consists of worthwhile, thoughtful actions, actions that are useful to others, and that all the happiness angels have is found in service, derives from service, and is proportional to service.

404. Some spirits who thought themselves better informed than others claimed that in the world they had held to the belief that heavenly joy consisted solely in praising and glorifying God, and that this was an active life. They have been told, though, that praising and glorifying God is not an appropriate kind of active life, since God has no need of praise and glorification. Rather, God wants us to be useful to each other, to do the worthwhile things that are called works of charity. However, they could not connect any notion of heavenly joy with thoughtful good deeds, only a notion of slavery. The angels, though, bore witness that it was the freest life of all because it stemmed from a deep affection and was invariably accompanied by an indescribable pleasure.

387. What Angels Do in Heaven

There is no way to list all the functions that people have in the heavens or to describe them in detail, though it is possible to say something on the subject in general terms; they are innumerable and vary depending on the roles of the communities as well. In fact, each community plays a unique role, since the communities differ depending on their virtues and therefore on their function. This is because virtues for everyone in the heavens are virtues in act, which are functions. Everyone there does something specifically useful, for the Lord's kingdom is a kingdom of uses.

388. There are many services in the heavens just as there are on earth, since there are ecclesiastical, civic, and domestic affairs there. The existence of the ecclesiastical ones follows from what was presented above about divine worship in #221-227, the existence of civic ones from what was presented about forms of government in heaven in #213-220, while the existence of domestic ones follows from the material on angels'

homes and houses (183-190) and on marriages in heaven (366-386). We can therefore see that the roles and services in any given heavenly community are multiple.

389. Everything in the heavens is arranged according to the divine design, which is managed everywhere by the oversight of angels, with the wiser ones tending to matters of the common good or use and the less wise to smaller details, and so on. These matters are ranked just as uses are ranked in the divine design. This also means that importance is attributed to each role in keeping with the importance of its use. Angels, however, do not claim any importance for themselves but ascribe it all to the use; and since the use is the good that it serves and everything good comes from the Lord, they ascribe it all to the Lord. This means that if people think about respect for themselves first and for their use secondarily instead of for the use first and for themselves secondarily, they cannot hold any office in heaven because they are looking away from the Lord, putting themselves first and their use second. To say "use" is to mean the Lord as well, since as just noted use is something good, and good comes from the Lord.

390. This enables us to determine what rankings in the heavens are like, namely that we love, value, and respect the functionaries the way we love, value, and respect the functions that are associated with them, and also that these functionaries are loved, valued, and respected to the extent that they do not attribute their use to themselves but to the Lord. To that extent they are wise, and to that extent they fulfill their uses from good motives. Spiritual love, value, and respect are nothing but love, value, and respect for the use in the role, respect for the role because of the use and not for the use because of the role. If we look at people from a spiritually true perspective, this is the only way to see them. Then we see one person as much like another, whether their rank is great or small. The only difference we see is a difference in wisdom, and wisdom is loving use, which means loving the welfare of our fellow citizens, our community, our country, and the church.

This is also what constitutes love for the Lord, since everything good that is effectively good comes from the Lord. It also constitutes love for our neighbor, since our neighbor is the welfare that is to be loved in our fellow citizens, our community, our country, and our church, and that is to be fostered for their sakes.

391. All the communities in the heavens are differentiated according to their forms of service because they are differentiated according to their virtues. Their virtues are virtues in action or acts of thoughtfulness, which are services. There are some communities whose tasks are to take care of babies; there are other communities whose tasks are to teach and lead children while they are growing up; there are other communities that look after young boys and girls who are well disposed because of the way they were raised in this world and have come [straight] to heaven, where they are taught and raised in much the same way. There are some that teach simple people from the Christian world and lead them on the way to heaven, and there are some that do the same for various non-Christian peoples. There are some that protect new spirits, just arrived from the world, from the attacks of evil spirits; and there are some who attend to people in the lower earth. Then there are some who attend to people in

the hells and control them so that they do not torture each other beyond set limits. There are also some who tend to people who are being awakened from their death.

Broadly speaking, angels of all communities are assigned to us to protect us, to lead us away from evil feelings and the evil thoughts that these cause and to instill good feelings to the extent that we are freely open to them. These serve to control our deeds or works by removing our evil intentions to the extent that this can be done. When angels are with us they seem to dwell in our affections, near us to the extent that we are engaged in something good because of truth, and distant to the extent that our life is removed from such engagement.

However, all these tasks are things the Lord does by means of angels, since angels do them not on their own but from the Lord. This is why in the deeper meaning of the Word "angels" does not mean angels but something of the Lord; and this is why angels are called gods in the Word.

392. These are general categories of angels' activities, but each individual has her or his own specific contribution to make. This is because every general service is made up of countless elements that are called mediate or subservient or supporting services. All of these are arranged and ranked according to the divine design, and taken together they make up and complete an overarching function that is the common good.

393. The people in heaven who are involved in church affairs are the ones who loved the Word in the world and looked for truths in it with lively interest, not for the sake of eminence or profit but for the service of their own life and the lives of others. In proportion to their love and eagerness for service, they are enlightened there and are in the light of wisdom, attaining it because of the Word in the heavens, which is not natural the way it is in the world, but spiritual. They have the gift of preaching; and in keeping with the divine design, the ones who are more highly placed there are the ones who surpass others in the wisdom they derive from their enlightenment.

[2] The people who are involved in civic affairs are the ones who loved their country and its welfare more than their own, who behaved honestly and fairly out of a love for what is honest and fair. To the extent that they sought out laws of justice because of the urging of this love and thereby became discerning they enjoy the ability to fill governing offices in heaven. They perform these duties in the place or on the level appropriate to their discernment, which in turn is equivalent to their love of service in the common good.

[3] Further, there are so many offices and departments in heaven, so many tasks, that there are simply too many to list. There are relatively few in the world. No matter how many people are involved, they are all caught up in a love of their work and tasks out of a love of service - no one out of selfishness or a love of profit. In fact, there is no love of profit for the sake of livelihood, since all the necessities of life are given them gratis. They are housed gratis, clothed gratis, and fed gratis. We can see from this that people who have loved themselves and the world more than service have no place in heaven.

In fact, our love or affection invariably stays with us after our life in the world. It is not uprooted to eternity.

Secrets of Heaven #1103[2]

Indeed everyone, no matter who, must in the next life perform a use; for the sole purpose for which a person is born is that he may perform a use to the community he is in, and to his neighbor, while he lives in the world, and in the next life may perform a use in accord with the Lord's gracious purposes. It is the same with the human body: everything there must perform a use - even the things which in themselves seem to be good for nothing, such as fluids which in themselves are waste matter, for example the many secretions of saliva, bile, and so on which not only have to serve food passing through but also to separate waste matters and clear the intestines. The same applies to the use performed by manure and dung in fields and vineyards; and so on.

Further exploration, if desired:

“Different Kinds of Angels” Off the Left Eye, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61GUEdk1P88>

“You Are The Lungs” Off the Left Eye, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcCDiylotl8>