

QUESTION 113

The Guardianship of the Good Angels

Next we have to consider the guardianship of the good angels (question 113) and the attacks of the bad angels (question 114).

On the first topic there are eight questions: (1) Are men guarded by angels? (2) Are individual angels assigned to guard individual men? (3) Does this guardianship involve only the lowest order of angels? (4) Does every man have a guardian angel? (5) When does an angel's guardianship of a man begin? (6) Does the angel always guard the man? (7) Does an angel grieve over the loss of the man he is guarding? (8) Is there conflict among the angels by reason of their guardianship?

Article 1

Are men guarded by angels?

It seems that men are not guarded by angels:

Objection 1: Guardians are assigned to someone either because he does not know how to guard himself or because he is unable to guard himself—as is the case, for instance, with children and the sick. But a man is able to guard himself because of his power of free choice, and he knows how to guard himself because of his natural cognition of the natural law. Therefore, a man is not guarded by an angel.

Objection 2: When a stronger guardian is present, a weaker guardian seems superfluous. But according to Psalm 120:4 (“He who guards Israel will not slumber or sleep”), men are guarded by God. Therefore, it is not necessary for a man to be guarded by an angel.

Objection 3: If the one who is being guarded is lost, this goes back to the negligence of the guardian; hence, 3 Kings 20:39 says, “Guard this man, and if he slips away, your life will be exchanged for his life.” But many men are lost every day by falling into sin, and the angels could have helped them by appearing visibly to them, or by working miracles, or in some other such way. Therefore, the angels would be negligent if men had been entrusted to their guardianship. But this is clearly false. Therefore, it is not the case that angels are the guardians of men.

But contrary to this: Psalm 90:11 says, “He has given His angels charge over you, to guard you in all your ways.”

I respond: In accord with the nature of divine providence, a feature found among all things is that what is movable and variable is moved and regulated by what is immovable and invariable. For instance, all corporeal things are moved and regulated by immovable spiritual substances, and all lower bodies are moved and regulated by those higher bodies that are invariable with respect to their substance. In fact, with respect to those conclusions about which we can come to have different opinions, we ourselves are regulated by principles that we hold invariably.

Now it is clear that in matters of action a man's cognition and affection can vary and fall short of the good in many ways. And so it was necessary that men be assigned guardian angels through whom they might be regulated and moved toward the good.

Reply to objection 1: Through free choice a man can avoid evil in some ways, but not adequately, since his affection for the good is weakened by the many passions of the soul. Similarly, the general cognition of the natural law that is naturally present in a man directs the man in some ways toward the good, but not adequately, since in applying the universal principles of the law to particular actions, a man can fail in many ways. Hence, Wisdom 9:14 says, “The thoughts of mortals are fearful and our counsels uncertain.” This is why the guardianship of the angels was necessary for a man.

Reply to objection 2: Two things are required for acting well. First, it is required that our

affections be inclined toward the good, and this happens in us through the habit of a moral virtue. Second, it is required that reason discover fitting ways to perfect the good of virtue, and this the Philosopher attributes to prudence.

As far as the first point is concerned, God guards a man directly by infusing grace and virtues into him. But as far as the second point is concerned, God guards man like a universal teacher (*instructor*) whose instruction, as has been explained (q. 111, a. 1), comes to a man through the mediation of the angels.

Reply to objection 3: Just as a man departs from his natural tendency toward the good because of the passions associated with sin, so too he departs from a good angel's incitement toward the good, which is effected invisibly by the angel's illuminating the man with respect to acting well. Hence, the fact that men are lost should be blamed not on the negligence of the angels, but on the wickedness of the men themselves.

Now the fact that, outside the general rule, angels sometimes appear visibly to men stems from a special grace of God, just like the fact that miracles are worked outside the order of nature.

Article 2

Are individual men guarded by individual angels?

It seems that individual men are not guarded by individual angels:

Objection 1: An angel is more powerful than a man. But one man is enough to guard many men. Therefore, *a fortiori*, one angel can guard many men.

Objection 2: As Dionysius says, lower things are led back to God through the mediation of higher things. But since all the angels are unequal to one another, there is only one angel who is such that there is no angel between him and men. Therefore, there is just one angel who directly guards all men.

Objection 3: Greater angels are assigned more important roles. But guarding any one man is not a more important role than guarding any other man, since all men are equal by nature. Therefore, since, according to Dionysius, the angels are such that no two of them are equal in greatness, it seems not to be the case that different men are guarded by different angels.

But contrary to this: In commenting on Matthew 18:10 ("Their angels in heaven ..."), Jerome says, "It is the great dignity of souls that each one has from birth an angel assigned to guard it."

I respond: Individual angels are assigned to guard individual men. The reason for this is that the guardianship of the angels is an execution of God's providence with respect to men. Now God's providence is related to men in a way different from the way it is related to other corruptible creatures, since men and other corruptible creatures are related in different ways to incorruptibility. For men are incorruptible not just with respect to their common species, but also with respect to the proper forms of each individual, viz., their rational souls, and this cannot be said of other corruptible entities.

Now it is clear that God's providence has to do principally with entities that endure forever, whereas there is divine providence with respect to transient things insofar as God orders such things toward the everlasting things. So, then, God's providence is related to *individual* men in the way it is related to the individual *genera* or *species* of corruptible things. But according to Gregory, different orders of angels are assigned to different genera of things; for instance, the Powers are assigned to restrain the demons, and the Virtues are assigned to work miracles among corporeal things. And it is plausible to think that different angels of a given order are put in charge of the different species of things. Hence, it is likewise reasonable to think that different angels are assigned to guard different men.

Reply to objection 1: There are two ways in which a guardian is assigned to a given man. In the first way, he is assigned insofar as the man is an *individual* man; on this score, there is normally one guardian for one man, though in some cases more than one guardian is assigned to guard a single man. In the second way, a guardian is assigned to a man insofar as the man is part of some *social group* (*collegium*); on this score, one guardian is put in charge of guarding the whole group, and his role is to oversee those things that pertain to an individual man in his relation to the whole group, e.g., external actions by which the others are edified or scandalized.

Now guardianship over men is entrusted to the angels with respect to invisible and hidden things that have to do with the salvation of individual men in their own right. This is why individual angels are assigned to guard individual men.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained (q. 112, a. 3), angels of the first hierarchy are all illuminated directly by God about certain things; however, there are other things about which only the highest angels are illuminated directly by God, and these things they reveal to the lower angels.

This same point must be taken into account within the lower orders of angels as well. For an angel at the lower end of a given order is illuminated about some things by an angel at the higher end, and he is illuminated about other things by the angel who is immediately above him. And so it is likewise possible for a man to be directly illuminated by an angel having other angels below him who are illuminated by him.

Reply to objection 3: Even though men are equal by nature, inequalities are nonetheless found among them to the extent that some have been ordered by divine providence toward more important things and others toward less important things—this in accord with Ecclesiasticus 33:11-12, “With much knowledge the Lord has divided them. Some of them He has blessed and exalted, and some of them He has cursed and brought low.” And in this way guarding one man can be a more important role than guarding some other man.

Article 3

Is it just angels of the lowest order who guard men?

It seems that it is not just angels of the lowest order who guard men:

Objection 1: Chrysostom claims that what is said in Matthew 18:10 (“Their angels in heaven ...”) “refers not to just any angels, but to the very highest.” Therefore, it is the very highest angels who guard men.

Objection 2: In Hebrews 1:14 the Apostle says that the angels have been “sent to minister for those who shall receive the inheritance of salvation,” and so it seems that the mission of the angels is ordered toward guarding men. But as was explained above (q. 112, a. 4), five orders of angels are sent exteriorly on mission to minister. Therefore, all the angels of those five orders are assigned to guard men.

Objection 3: In order to guard men, it seems especially necessary (a) to restrain the demons, which, according to Gregory, pertains to the Powers, and (b) to work miracles, which pertains to the Virtues. Therefore, these two orders are also assigned to guard men, and not just the lowest order.

But contrary to this: In Psalm 90:11 guardianship of men is assigned to the Angels, whose order is the lowest according to Dionysius.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 2), there are two ways in which guardianship is assigned over a man.

In the first way, the guardianship is *particular*, insofar as individual angels are assigned to guard individual men. And this sort of guardianship belongs to the lowest order of angels, whose role, according to Gregory, is to announce the smallest things, and what seems to be smallest among the angelic roles is to take care of what pertains to the salvation of just one man.

The second sort of guardianship is *universal*, and this sort of guardianship is spread out over different orders of angels, since the more universally an agent acts, the higher it is. So, then, guardianship over the whole human race belongs to the order of Principalities or, perhaps better, to the order of Archangels, who are called ‘angel princes’—thus Michael, whom we call an Archangel, is called one of the princes in Daniel 10:13. Again, the Virtues have guardianship over all corporeal natures, and the Powers keep guard over the demons. And, lastly, according to Gregory, the Principalities have guardianship over the good spirits.

Reply to objection 1: The passage from Chrysostom can be understood in such a way that he is talking about the highest angels within the lowest order of angels. For as Dionysius says, in each order there are some who are first, some who are in the middle, and some who are last.

However, it is plausible to think that the greater angels are assigned to guard those who have been chosen by God for a higher degree of glory.

Reply to objection 2: Not all the angels who are sent on mission have particular guardianship over individual men. Instead, as has been explained, some of the orders have a more or less universal guardianship.

Reply to objection 3: The lower angels also exercise the roles of the higher angels to the extent that they participate to some degree in the gift of the higher angels, and to the extent that they execute the power of the higher angels. And it is in this sense that the lowest angels can also restrain the demons and work miracles.

Article 4

Does every man have an angel assigned to guard him?

It seems that not every man has an angel assigned to guard him:

Objection 1: Philippians 2:7 says of Christ that he is “made in the likeness of men, and in appearance (*habitus*) found as a man.” Therefore, if every man is such that an angel is assigned to guard him, then even Christ had a guardian angel. But this seems absurd, since Christ is greater than all the angels. Therefore, not every man has an angel assigned to guard him.

Objection 2: The first of all men was Adam. But it was not appropriate for him to have a guardian angel, at least in the state of innocence, since in that state he was not threatened by any dangers. Therefore, not every man is such that an angel is appointed to guard him.

Objection 3: Angels are assigned to guard men in order to lead them to eternal life, and to incite them to act well, and to protect them against the attacks of the demons. But men who are foreknown to be damned never attain eternal life. For instance, non-believers, even if they sometimes do good works, do not do them well, since they do not do them with the right intention; for as Augustine says, “It is faith that sets one’s intention aright.” In addition, as 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says, the coming of the Antichrist will be “in keeping with the work of Satan.” Therefore, not every man has an angel assigned to guard him.

But contrary to this: In the passage from Jerome alluded to above (a. 2), he says, “Each soul has an angel assigned to guard it.”

I respond: A man in the state of the present life is, as it were, on a road (*via*) by which he ought to travel to heaven (*ad patriam*). On this road many dangers threaten a man, both from within and from without—this according to Psalm 141:4: “In this way wherein I walked, they have hidden a snare for me.” And so just as guardians are provided for men who are walking along an unsafe road, so a guardian angel is assigned to each man for as long as he is a wayfarer (*viator*). But once he reaches the end of the road, he will no longer have a guardian angel. Instead, he will have either an angel to reign with him in heaven or a demon to punish him in hell.

Reply to objection 1: Christ, insofar as He is a man, was directly regulated by the Word of God, and so he did not need a guardian angel. Again, as far as His soul is concerned, He was a comprehender of the divine essence (*comprehensor*), whereas by reason of the passibility of His body, He was a wayfarer (*viator*).

Accordingly, it was not appropriate for Him to have a guardian angel as a superior, but it was appropriate for Him to have a ministering angel as an inferior. Hence, Matthew 4:11 says, “Angels came and ministered to Him.”

Reply to objection 2: In the state of innocence man was not subject to any danger from within, since, as was explained above (q. 95, aa. 1 and 3), everything interior was well-ordered. However, he was threatened with danger from without, because of the snares of the demons—as is proved by how things turned out. And so the man needed angels to guard him.

Reply to objection 3: Just as non-believers and those foreknown to be damned—and even the Antichrist—are not deprived of the interior assistance of natural reason, so they are not deprived of the exterior assistance given by God to the whole human race, viz., the guardianship of the angels. Even if they are not helped by this guardianship to merit eternal life by good works, they are nonetheless helped in being held back from certain evils by which they can harm themselves and others. For even the demons themselves are restrained by the good angels from doing as much harm as they want to. Similarly, the Antichrist will not do as much harm as he will want to.

Article 5

Is an angel assigned to guard a man from his birth?

It seems that an angel is not assigned to guard a man from his birth:

Objection 1: Angels are sent on mission to minister “for those who shall receive the inheritance of salvation,” as the Apostle says in Hebrews 1:14. But men begin to receive the inheritance of salvation when they are baptized. Therefore, an angel is assigned to guard a man from the time of his baptism and not from the time of his birth.

Objection 2: Men are guarded by angels in the sense that the angels illuminate them in the manner of a teacher. But right after their birth, children are not capable of learning, since they do not have the use of reason. Therefore, angels are not assigned to children right after birth.

Objection 3: Children who are in their mother’s womb have a rational soul at some time, just as they do after being born. But when these children are in their mother’s womb, the angels are not, it seems, assigned to guard them, given that the ministers of the Church do not at that time give them the sacraments. Therefore, angels are not assigned to guard men immediately upon their birth.

But contrary to this: Jerome says, “Each soul has from birth an angel assigned to guard it.”

I respond: As Origen points out in *Super Matthaëum*, there are two opinions about this matter. Some have claimed that an angel is assigned to guard a man from the time of his baptism, while others

have claimed that this happens at the time of his birth.

The second opinion is the one favored by Jerome, and with good reason. For the gifts that God gives a man in virtue of his being a Christian, e.g., receiving the Eucharist and other such gifts, begin at the time of his baptism. But the gifts that God provides to a man insofar as he has a rational nature are bestowed on him at the time he receives that nature by being born. And as is clear from what has been said already (aa. 1 and 4), one such gift is the guardianship of the angels. Hence, immediately upon his birth a man has an angel assigned to guard him.

Reply to objection 1: If we consider the ultimate effect of the guardianship of the angels, viz., the reception of the inheritance of salvation, then the angels are, to be sure, *efficaciously* sent to minister only for the sake of those who receive that inheritance. Nonetheless, the ministry of the angels is not withdrawn from the others, even though it does not have efficacy in them in the sense of their being led to salvation. Yet the angels' ministry to them is efficacious to the extent that they are drawn back from many evils.

Reply to objection 2: The role of guardianship is ordered toward illumination through teaching as its ultimate and principal effect. Nonetheless, it has many other effects that are appropriate for children, e.g., restraining the demons and preventing other sorts of harm, both corporeal and spiritual.

Reply to objection 3: For as long as a child is in his mother's womb he is not totally separate from his mother, but still belongs to her in a certain sense because they are attached to one another—in the same way that a fruit hanging from a tree belongs to the tree. And so it is plausible to claim that the angel who guards the mother also guards the offspring in the mother's womb. But as Jerome says, when the child is separated from the mother at birth, an angel is assigned to guard him.

Article 6

Does a guardian angel ever desert the man whom he is assigned to guard?

It seems that a guardian angel sometimes deserts the man whom he is assigned to guard:

Objection 1: Jeremiah 51:9 says in the person of the angels, "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed. Let us forsake her." And Isaiah 5:5 says, "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted," and a Gloss says, "The hedge, i.e., the guardianship of the angels."

Objection 2: God is a more principal guardian than an angel. But according to Psalm 21:2 ("My God, my God, look upon me. Why have you forsaken me?"), God sometimes forsakes a man. Therefore, *a fortiori*, a guardian angel forsakes a man.

Objection 3: As Damascene says, when the angels are here with us, they are not in heaven. But they are sometimes in heaven. Therefore, sometimes they forsake us.

But contrary to this: According to 1 Peter 5:8 ("Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour"), the demons are always assailing us. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the good angels are always guarding us.

I respond: As is clear from what was said above (a. 2), the guardianship of the angels is an execution of divine providence effected with respect to men. Now it is clear that neither a man nor any other entity is completely withdrawn from divine providence, since to the extent that something participates in *esse*, it is subject to God's universal providence over beings. However, God is said to forsake a man, in a way consonant with the order of His providence, to the extent that He permits the man to suffer from some defect of either punishment or sin.

Similarly, one should claim that a guardian angel never completely leaves a man, but that he does

sometimes leave him in some respect or other—as when he does not prevent him from undergoing some tribulation or even from falling into sin, in keeping with the order of God’s judgments. This is the sense in which Babylon and the house of Israel are said to have been forsaken by the angels; for their guardian angels did not prevent them from undergoing tribulations.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2: The replies to the first and second objections are clear from what has been said.

Reply to objection 3: Even if an angel sometimes leaves a man with respect to place, he does not leave him with respect to the effect of guardianship. For even when he is in heaven, he knows what is going on with the man; and he does not need a length of time for his local motion, but can instead make himself present immediately.

Article 7

Do angels grieve over the evils of those whom they are guarding?

It seems that angels grieve over the evils of those whom they are guarding:

Objection 1: Isaiah 33:7 says, “The angels of peace shall weep bitterly.” But weeping is a sign of sorrow and sadness. Therefore, the angels are saddened by the evils of the men they are guarding.

Objection 2: As Augustine says, sadness “is directed at those things that happen to us against our will.” But the loss of a man whom he is guarding is contrary to the will of a guardian angel. Therefore, the angels are saddened when men are lost.

Objection 3: Just as sadness is opposed to joy, so sin is opposed to repentance. But as Luke 15:7 says, the angels rejoice over a sinner who repents. Therefore, they grieve over a just man who falls into sin.

Objection 4: Origen’s gloss on Numbers 18:12 (“Whatever first fruits they offer ...”) says, “The angels are called to judgment about whether it is because of their own negligence that men have sinned, or whether it is because of the men’s weakness.” But it is reasonable for someone to be saddened by evils in light of which he is called to judgment. Therefore, the angels grieve over the sins of men.

But contrary to this: Where there are sadness and sorrow, there is no perfect happiness; hence, Apocalypse 21:4 says, “Death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor any sorrow.” But the angels are perfectly happy. Therefore, they do not grieve over anything.

I respond: The angels do not grieve over either the sins or the punishments of men. For according to Augustine, sadness and sorrow are directed only at things that are contrary to one’s will. But nothing that happens in the world is contrary to the will of the angels or the will of the others who are beatified, since their will adheres completely to the order of God’s justice, and nothing happens in the world except what is either effected or permitted by God’s justice. And so, absolutely speaking, nothing that happens in the world is contrary to the will of those who are beatified. For as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 3, what is voluntary, absolutely speaking, is what someone wills *in the particular case*, insofar as it is done with all the circumstances taken into consideration—even if it would not be voluntary if it were considered *in general*. For instance, a sailor does not will to throw his cargo into the sea when this is considered by itself and in general; but he does will to do it when a danger to safety threatens. Hence, as the Philosopher says in the same place, the act is voluntary rather than involuntary.

So, then, angels do not will the sins and punishments of men, when these are considered by themselves and in general; but they do will that the order of God’s justice should be preserved concerning such matters, and according to the order of God’s justice some men are subject to

punishments and are permitted to sin.

Reply to objection 1: This passage from Isaiah can be understood of Hezekiah's angels, i.e., Hezekiah's messengers, who wept because of the words of the Rabshakeh of which Isaiah 37:2ff. speaks. This is according to the literal sense.

As for the allegorical sense, the angels of peace are the apostles and other preachers, who weep over the sins of men.

On the other hand, if the passage is understood in the anagogical sense to be about the beatified angels, then the locution in question is metaphorical, and the meaning is that the angels will the salvation of men in general. For this is the sense in which these sorts of passions are attributed to God and the angels.

Reply to objection 2: The answer to this objection is clear from what was said above.

Reply to objection 3: With respect to both the repentance of men and their sin, the explanation of joy remains the same in the angels, viz., the fulfillment of the order of God's providence.

Reply to objection 4: The angels are called to judgment for the sins of men not as defendants but as witnesses, in order to convict men of their weakness.

Article 8

Can there be conflict or discord among the angels?

It seems that there cannot be conflict or discord among the angels:

Objection 1: Job 25:2 says, "... who makes concord in His high places." But conflict is opposed to concord. Therefore, there is no conflict among the sublime angels.

Objection 2: Where there is perfect charity and just rule, there can be no conflict. But all this exists among the angels. Therefore, there is no conflict among the angels.

Objection 3: If the angels are said to be in conflict over those whom they are guarding, then it must be that one angel takes one side and another angel takes the other side. But if the one side is just, then, conversely, the other side is unjust. Therefore, it follows that a good angel is a promoter of injustice—which is absurd. Therefore, there is no conflict among the good angels.

But contrary to this: Daniel 10:13 says in the person of Gabriel, "The prince of the kingdom of the Persians resisted me one and twenty days." But this prince of the Persians was the angel assigned to guard the kingdom of the Persians. Therefore, one good angel resisted another, and so there was a conflict between them.

I respond: This question is occasioned by the words just cited from Daniel.

Jerome explains them by saying that the prince of the kingdom of the Persians is an angel who had set himself in opposition to the liberation of the people of Israel, on whose behalf Daniel was praying, with Gabriel presenting his prayers to God.

Now it could be that this resistance was being put up because some prince of the demons had led the Jews taken to Persia into sin, and this posed an obstacle to the prayer of Daniel, who was praying on the behalf of these same people. However, according to Gregory in *Moralia* 17, the prince of the kingdom of the Persians was a good angel assigned to guard that kingdom.

Thus, to see how one angel is said to resist another, notice that God's judgments concerning different kingdoms and different men are executed by the angels, and in their actions the angels are regulated by God's decrees. However, it sometimes happens that among different kingdoms (or different men) there are contrary merits and demerits, so that the one kingdom (or man) is made subject to, or put

in charge of, the other. But without a revelation on God's part, the angels cannot know what the order of God's wisdom has decreed concerning a given case, and so they must consult God's wisdom about it. So, then, insofar as the angels consult God's will about contrary and mutually incompatible merits, they are said to resist one another—not because their wills are opposed to one another, since they all agree that God's decree should be fulfilled, but because the things about which they are consulting are opposed to one another.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: The replies to the objections are clear from what has been said.