

## The Angels and Cosmic Liturgy: An Oratorian Angelology

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MAN IS essentially a liturgical creature, *homo adorans*, and in this he recapitulates in his own being the essence of creation. He is both *imago Dei* and microcosm. He is the synthesis of created being who is, as many Church Fathers understood, imprinted in his very nature with the divine task to unify the created order in his life of praise, lifting up all things in sacrifice to the triune God, who brought him and all of creation into being out of nothing. His religious activity is of cosmic importance. The liturgy of the Church, which God has given to man as the highest of all his gifts, is the culmination of both history and the cosmos. Indeed, the liturgy of the Eucharist is, to borrow an expression from Pope Benedict XVI, the motive for the existence of all things in creation.<sup>1</sup>

In recapitulating the order of creation in his own liturgical being, man is intimately intertwined in his destiny with the hierarchy of the angels. This is a traditional doctrine of theological anthropology and one that has been neglected by many modern Catholic theologians. But there are at least two theologians who stand as notable exceptions to this general neglect: the English Oratorian Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801–1890) and the French Oratorian Louis Bouyer (1913–2004). Both of these great Oratorian theologians had a profound sense of the cosmic presence of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Meditation during the First General Congregation of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (6 October 2008). The Holy Father, in this meditation, refers to salvation history as the “motive” for creation. This statement is in accord with the context of his wider thought which is, of course, strongly liturgical: as he has said, the Church, the preordained locus for God’s encounter with his creature, subsists in the liturgy.

angels and of the connection of angelology to anthropology. Bouyer, an eminent scholar of Newman and, like Newman, a convert to the Catholic Church, gave a systematic and biblical exposition of the cosmic mission of the angels that is very much a development of Newman's angelology. He placed the angelology that Newman had articulated in his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* into the context of a theology of the Eucharist, of the Paschal Mystery, and of the liturgy of creation. It is my goal in the present study to give a detailed exposition of the angelology of Newman's that Bouyer develops in the context of the motif of cosmic liturgy. I shall start, in a first section, with a brief exposition of Newman's theology of the angels as found in his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* and of Bouyer's development of this theology. In a second section, I shall make a couple of brief suggestions in regard to the rational credibility of angelology, particularly by drawing on arguments from Berkeley, a figure who looms in the background of Newman's angelology, and from Saint Thomas. In a third section, I shall place, with Bouyer, the liturgy of the angels and the Eucharistic liturgy into the context of the story of salvation and of the quest for liturgical ascent that is the essence of human and all created existence. In a fourth and concluding section, I shall briefly argue that Newman and Bouyer together enable us, through their emphasis on the invisible world of the angels as the deepest motive force in the cosmos, to recover the cosmic breadth of the Christian vision of faith and a full sense of the importance of the liturgy of the Church as the highest activity in creation. Their angelology, I shall argue in this concluding section, is of great practical importance.

### Newman's "Sacramental System"

#### *Cardinal Newman's Angelology*

Both Newman and Bouyer are quite forceful in drawing our attention to the reality of the invisible world of angels, which, on the shared interpretation of these two followers of Saint Philip Neri, Scripture reveals to be the deepest dimension of our own world. The invisible world of angelic persons is, on their interpretation, at once beyond our world and within it. We are meant to experience it as the hidden essence of our own world through the gift of faith and by our participation in the liturgy. In line with Pseudo-Dionysius and Saint Thomas, each of these great Oratorians sees that the angelic hierarchy is as diverse in its magnitude of species as the hierarchy of physical creation itself, which can be understood to be the inverse reflection of the angelic hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> Each man

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Louis Bouyer, *Cosmos: The World and the Glory of God*, trans. Pierre de Fontenouvelle (Petersham, MA: Saint Bede's Publications, 1988), 199–200.

shows that all of created reality is personal or reflective of personal existences, uncreated and created. Even the physical world is, as Bouyer says, "but the envelope, the external clothing of a wholly spiritual world."<sup>3</sup> It is, as Newman says, "the skirts of their garments, the waving robes of those whose faces see God."<sup>4</sup>

Newman had, from early on in his ecclesiastical career, powerfully preached about the ultimate reality in our midst of the invisible world of the angels. There were two early sermons of his in which he did so with particular boldness, and that proved formative for Bouyer: "The Powers of Nature," found in volume 2 of Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, and "The Invisible World," found in volume 4 of the same collection.

In his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, written some years after his conversion to the Catholic faith, Newman explained his understanding of the invisible world, which he, in this writing, referred to as his "Sacramental system."<sup>5</sup> Newman saw the world in the light of an analogy between the celestial and terrestrial realms. He admitted in this writing a possible connection between his sacramental view of the world and what he calls the "Berkleyism" of Anglophone theology, though he says that he never directly studied Berkeley.<sup>6</sup> Louis Dupré has suggested that Berkeley's thinking may have reached Newman indirectly through the latter's reading of Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed* (1736).<sup>7</sup> Be that as it may, Newman's evangelical faith, in connection with his inherent poetic sense, had given him the capacity, from very early on in life, to see the material universe in a powerfully religious light. His reading of the Church Fathers confirmed him in this way of seeing. He relates to us that some portion of the teachings of the Fathers "came like music" to his inward ear,

as if in response to ideas, which, with little external to encourage them, I had cherished so long. These were based on the mystical or sacramental principle, and spoke of the various Economies or Dispensations of the Eternal. I understood these passages to mean that the exterior world, physical and historical, was but the manifestation to our senses

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>4</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Penguin, 2004), 45. Newman quotes here from a sermon that he had preached on Michaelmas Day in 1831.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Dupré, "Newman and the Neoplatonic Tradition in England," in *Newman and the Word*, ed. Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Kerr (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 143–44.

of realities greater than itself. Nature was a parable: Scripture was an allegory: pagan literature, philosophy, and mythology, properly understood, were but a preparation for the Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Newman saw the whole of creation and history as a *praeparatio evangelii*. The fullness of God's revelation was directly foreshadowed in the Jewish prophets and indirectly foreshadowed in the pagan prophets, who also were inspired by thoughts beyond their own. It is especially in the school of the Alexandrian masters that Newman found resonance with this intuitive, poetic vision of the universe and of history. This "Christian Platonism" of his comes to the fore in his discussion of how near to his own thinking he found the Alexandrian masters to be in regard to the angels. For both Newman and the Alexandrian theologians, the angels are not only

the ministers employed by the Creator in the Jewish and Christian dispensations, as we find on the face of Scripture, but as carrying on, as Scripture also implies, the Economy of the Visible World. I considered them as the real causes of motion, light, and life, and of those elementary principles of the physical universe, which, when offered in their development to our senses, suggest to us the notion of cause and effect, and of what are called the laws of nature.<sup>9</sup>

In this same passage, Newman repeats what he had said in "The Powers of Nature," a sermon that he had preached for Michaelmas Day in 1831: "Every breath of air and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God." Though he speaks in the *Apologia* of his cosmology of the angels in the past tense, a view that he had long cherished, there is no indication that he ever forsook his "Sacramental system."

In his two sermons mentioned above, Newman endeavors to bring his modern congregation to a conscious awakening to the reality of the invisible world. In the "Powers of Nature," he argues that if we are to see the world in its deepest religious significance, we must strive, through faith, to recognize that all created things are in the service of God. The world itself is a revelation of God, and all things have meaning in proportion to their glorification of God.<sup>10</sup> In "The Invisible World," Newman shows the rationality of the scriptural view of creation. It is no less stunning, he argues, to our quotidian sensibilities to consider the angelic world than it

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<sup>8</sup> Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John Henry Newman, "The Powers of Nature," in *Sermons and Discourses* (New York: Longmans and Green, 1949), 64–71.

is to consider the myriad unseen worlds that constitute visible nature, and even human society. Even the physical and historical worlds, he argues, are constituted by worlds within worlds, a known fact whose consideration should make it less strange for us to acknowledge the existence of the angelic realms. The physical world is constituted by animals whose natures we can never fathom, whose activities go largely unseen by us. Indeed, their existence, as we experience it, though we can never fathom the depths of their brute natures, points to a mysterious depth of being at the heart of nature. This depth of being, Newman implies, is a reality that goes far beyond the ability of reductionist science to grasp in its nets. History itself is constituted by human societies within societies, whose activities are unknown outside of their respective spheres. Each of us lives in a particular society or sphere: of poets, of scientists, of religious men, of scholars, of artists, of artisans. And we live in our respective spheres, going about our daily lives, as if other societies or spheres did not even exist.<sup>11</sup>

Newman teaches that the invisible world of the angels is no less present to us than the worlds within our visible world that go unseen by us but that we know to exist. Through the light of faith we know that the invisible world of the angels is always present to us, in our own world, though it will only burst forth, into the open, in the future. Yet, he argues, we can reasonably anticipate this eschatological breaking-in of the invisible world by considering it as analogous to the yearly emergence of the flourishing of springtime in nature, in which life and activity burst forth from out of the frozen winter. Just as in the change of the seasons from winter to spring the budding of the trees and the flowering of the earth transfigures the barren, wintry soil, so the eternal springtime that is to come will break through into our world. The veil that at present covers the invisible world will be removed. The eternal kingdom of God, hidden within the world of our direct experience, will shine forth in Christ's Second Coming. "Shine forth, O Lord," Newman prays in order to hasten the coming of the eternal springtime, "as when on Thy Nativity Thine Angels visited the shepherds: let Thy glory blossom forth as bloom and foliage on the trees; change with Thy mighty power this visible world into that diviner world, which as yet we see not . . ." <sup>12</sup>

### *Bouyer's Liturgical Extrapolations*

This sacramental cosmology preached by Newman elicited a strong attraction in Bouyer from his first encounter with it. His first published

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<sup>11</sup> John Henry Newman, "The Invisible World," in *Sermons and Discourses* (New York: Longmans and Green, 1949), 258–68.

<sup>12</sup> Newman, "The Invisible World," 266.

study was dedicated to Newman's cosmological vision, which he considered to be indicative of the influence of Christian Platonism in English theology.<sup>13</sup> Bouyer wrote a book on theological cosmology—as part of a nine-volume synthesis of Catholic doctrine, which can be understood as the fruit of lifelong reflection, drawn from study of the whole Christian tradition and in conversation with modern thought—on the implications of Newman's "Sacramental system." He brings his reflections on Newman's Sacramental system to expression with a rhetorical aplomb that rivals Newman's own famously beautiful prose. He sees Newman's cosmological angelology in explicit connection with the Church's traditional doctrine that all of creation is from the Trinity. The entire world, seen in this light, is but a reflection of the Trinitarian glory, though marked by struggle and conflict because of the Fall of the angels and of man. Bouyer contends that it must be concluded from this Trinitarian understanding of creation that the universe is itself personal in character, reflecting the personal reality of God's inner life. In expounding this tradition of Trinitarian creationism, Bouyer puts the point very strongly: "since God is the quintessentially personal being, the only world he could conceivably create is a world of persons."<sup>14</sup> Given that this is so, it follows that the angels are essential to the very meaning of God's creation.

There can be little denying the fact, on Bouyer's reading, that biblical cosmology, in all of the senses in which Scripture can be taken, requires the theologian who sees with the eyes of faith to acknowledge the existence, power, and cosmic importance of the angels. Indeed, Bouyer, more thoroughly than any other theologian in the past two centuries, makes the case for a biblical cosmology of the angels.<sup>15</sup> He argues that if the angels are demythologized, the books of Scripture, and the Gospels most of all, become meaningless, and the world is no longer able to be seen in its fully religious significance.<sup>16</sup>

There is a specifically liturgical dimension that forms the basis for the religious cosmology that he brings to light. Bouyer is well known as a theologian of the Eucharist. His theological work is founded on the study of the Church's liturgical texts and rites. He was not only one of the Church's greatest modern theologians but one of her greatest liturgists.

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<sup>13</sup> Louis Bouyer, "Newman et le Platonisme de l'Ame Anglaise," in *Revue de Philosophie* (July 1936): 285–305.

<sup>14</sup> Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 194.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Louis Bouyer, "Les Deux Économies du Gouvernement Divin: Satan et le Christ," in *Initiation Théologique* par un groupe de théologiens (Paris: Cerf, 1952), 504–35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

In his role as liturgist, he traced, in a study of capital importance, the Eucharistic prayer in its many variations and its development. In studying the development of the Eucharistic prayer he saw, among many other important insights, that the liturgical texts of the tradition cannot be clearer in their support of Cardinal Newman's angelology. The Eucharistic texts, like Newman himself, speak of a hierarchy of angels forming a seamless whole with the world of our direct experience.<sup>17</sup>

There is a particular section of this study of his on the Eucharist where he brings out this point in full.<sup>18</sup> He shows that the Jewish-Christian liturgical interpretation of God's revelation understands the invisible world of angels and the visible world of physical nature to be so closely interwoven that it cannot be truly said that there are two worlds, visible and invisible. It is better to say that there is only one world in two aspects.<sup>19</sup> Bouyer demonstrates that it is not at all a Platonic distortion of Christian revelation to interpret cosmic processes in connection with the angelic presences. In fact, he argues, the Jewish-Christian mind is quite unlike the purely Hellenistic in refusing to separate the visible light of creation from the invisible light of the spiritual world and to oppose them.<sup>20</sup> Platonism is transformed in this regard in its encounter with biblical revelation, not the other way around. Biblical revelation, interpreted through liturgy, shows, contra the Hellenistic mentality, that the angelic world and the physical world "are but two successive aspects of one reality."<sup>21</sup> "The angelic world," Bouyer says, "is not a world different from the material world." "It is," he continues, "the same, although seen in its deepest or most exalted aspect."<sup>22</sup>

Following the exegesis in a book by A. M. Ramsey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Bouyer expounds the meaning of Isaiah 6, so essential to the Jewish liturgy, in terms of the connection of the angels to the glory of God. It is worth quoting the essential points of Bouyer's exegesis of this biblical text and its liturgical interpretation in full:

The higher Angels, the Seraphim, as their name indicates, are themselves products of a mysterious fire which is like a first reflection of the glowing hearth of the divine life, and the altar fire and sanctuary lamps

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<sup>17</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 64–68.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

act as a reminder of it. This fire recalls the illumination, the transfiguration of all things that is the product of the descent of the *Shekinah*, the divine presence, in the luminous cloud in which it is enveloped. The glory given to God by the Seraphim's singing of the *Qedushah* is the reflection of divine glory returning to its source. But in them it is a conscious reflection expressed in song, just as in God the igneous light is that of the Spirit expressed in the Word.<sup>23</sup>

Humanity has, on this liturgical interpretation, the responsibility to join its own song of praise to that of the angels, as all of creation together returns in glory to God. The cosmic dimension of the Eucharist of Christ is a consummating continuation of this Jewish biblical and liturgical understanding of the lyrical return of creation to the Creator. Christ is the fully embodied, personal presence of the *Shekinah*, who makes possible, through his expiatory sacrifice on the Cross, the return of all creation to the Father in a liturgy of praise centered on the Church's Eucharist.<sup>24</sup>

In his theological study of the cosmos in his trilogies on Catholic doctrine, Bouyer invokes wide streams of traditional Christian theology to express the intelligibility of this biblical notion of cosmic liturgy that was present in the Jewish tradition and consummated in Christ. He brings to the fore especially the Christian mysticisms of light and music, the Taboric Light and the Canticle of Creation, as foundational for a Christian articulation of cosmology. In its essence, according to these streams of the tradition, all of the cosmos was meant to be a choral Eucharist or symphony of gratitude and praise to the Creator. It was meant to be a translation into the realm of finitude of the infinite glory of the one, true King. It was first of all the creation of the choirs of angels, the first-born heavenly stewards and ministers of the cosmos.<sup>25</sup> This theological cosmology is symbolist and personal rather than purely metaphysical—it stresses symbolic analogy between the corporeal realm and the spiritual—but it is rational in the way of the unified ordering of a musical symphony.

The theology that Saint Francis would bring to expression in his Canticle of Creation was prefigured by Saint Augustine in the West and by those who followed him. Drawing on this tradition, Bouyer makes striking use of the metaphor of music to describe creation. He sees the angels as a unified choir composed of an immense, harmonious array of tonal components, each tone representative of a person, from which the physical universe itself emerges. All of the particles of the universe, all of

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 65. The book by Ramsey is *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Oxford, 1964).

<sup>24</sup> Bouyer, *Eucharist*, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 194–208.



its material energies, are moved by and formed through the resonant power of these angelic choirs. But it is particularly in terms of temporal harmony that the musical metaphor has its direct application: by fixing their watchful eyes on the conductor and Creator, the angels keep the temporal measure and rhythm of the universe.<sup>26</sup>

The theology of the Light of Tabor was first developed in the Eastern tradition, most profoundly so by Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. A.D. 500), the elusive, pseudonymous mystical theologian who so greatly influenced Western Scholastic theology in the thirteenth century. Saint Bonaventure would bring this theology of light to an even fuller articulation. Bouyer follows Pseudo-Dionysius in invoking the theology of light to express the spatial dimension of creation. He suggests that the world is like “a shimmering white light breaking down into the harmony of innumerable colors that distinguish themselves only by melting into one another.”<sup>27</sup> Both of these images, musical and visual, evoke in us a sense that creation is a reflection of the harmonious unity in diversity of the triune God. These images enable us to envisage materiality as a religious and sacramental reality. They enable us to see more readily than is our modern wont that mind and will are ever-present causal influences in the world of nature.

Bouyer follows Pseudo-Dionysius's theology in suggesting that the creation of the material world is so much carried out through the ministry of the angels that it is like a projection into being of their very thoughts, just as they were themselves projected into a free and distinct existence through the thought and free will of the Creator.<sup>28</sup> This is an idea very much in line with Newman's preaching that the angels are “the real causes of motion, light, and life.”<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that another great modern Catholic intellectual, J. R. R. Tolkien, who was a personal friend of Bouyer's, also thought of the causal influence of the angels in this way. In his book *The Silmarillion*, he sees the angels as instruments used by God in the creation of the material world. Peter Kreeft, following C. S. Lewis, has suggested that this way of seeing the cosmic role of the angels is important in addressing the riddle of cosmic evil.<sup>30</sup> This Pseudo-Dionysian (or Newmanian or Tolkienian) manner of speaking about the

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 198–49.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 209–10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>29</sup> See above, note 9.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview behind the Lord of the Rings* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 72–73. Bouyer acknowledges his indebtedness to J. R. R. Tolkien, of whom he was the first French reader, in his *Les Métier de théologien: Entretiens avec Georges Daix* (Geneva: Ad Solem: 2005), 114–15. See also Bouyer, *Les Lieux Magiques du Graal* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1986), 12.

causal power of the angels sounds foreign to many Western Christian ears, and it may seem to threaten the integrity of lower levels of secondary causalities in their various spheres. Moreover, it might seem to take away from God his unique, creative causality.

To defend against these concerns, one must have a full sense of Pseudo-Dionysius's theology of the hierarchy of creation, which Bouyer himself sympathetically analyzes. It is important not to confuse his understanding of the celestial hierarchy with that of the pagan neo-Platonists. For Pseudo-Dionysius, all of creation is indeed constituted by its interpersonal and hierarchical relationality, but this is not, as for the neo-Platonists, a static, compartmentalized hierarchy that returns to its source only by self-annihilation. Pseudo-Dionysius sees that creation extends and communicates in the wondrous diversity of its finitude the eternal *agape* of the divine thearchy.<sup>31</sup> His theology of the angels enables us to see that even though the world is hierarchically constituted, each stratum of finite being having its own particular integrity, it is nevertheless the case that the hierarchy of creation is a dynamic and ceaselessly intercommunicating reality. Each being on a higher level is all that it is, and keeps all that it has, which is itself a divine gift, only in giving itself away. Influence from above and self-completion are not mutually contradictory realities in this view of nature, and there is dynamism to this theology—as it sees creation as ceaselessly returning to its source. Moreover, the angels do not replace God as the creators of matter. Rather, God creates lower dimensions of being through the higher, and thus it can be said that the angels participate, in some mysterious manner, in the creation of the lower regions of the universe. It is in this sense that we might understand that even though matter is a “kind of projection of angelic thoughts,” to use Bouyer's words, it is nevertheless a direct creation of the divine will. Bouyer himself argues that God, through his divine fiat, gives the angelic thoughts an autonomous existence, just as he had given the angels, who were once his own thoughts in his eternal Word, an autonomous existence by breathing the fire of his Spirit into them.<sup>32</sup>

One often speaks, as I have done above, of Christian Platonism, and the Oratorian theology of cosmic liturgy that I am discussing here certainly fits

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Endre von Ivanka, *La signification du Corpus Aeropagiticum*, in *Recherches de science religieuse* 36 (1949): 18. One should also mention in this regard Edith Stein's much-neglected comments on the angelology of Pseudo-Dionysius in her *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002), 411–17.

<sup>32</sup> Dom Denys Rutledge argued in *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964) that, for Pseudo-Dionysius, the angels were the creators of matter. Bouyer rejects this extreme interpretation.

into the category that one imagines obtains in the application of this label to various theologies. But the truism must be reasserted that Plato's philosophy was transformed when it was brought into the ambit of revealed religion and used to express the Christian mystery. The personalism that I have described in this study so far is indicative of this transformation. Bouyer himself gives an interesting account of how certain Church Fathers transformed Plato's doctrine of divine ideas. He shows that, unlike Plato, the great patristic Christian theologians understood the divine ideas, through which all of creation is modeled and created, to be, not static and lifeless, but vivified, personal presences in the divine mind, more specifically contained in the divine Word in whom the Father eternally expresses his being.<sup>33</sup> On this Christian view, the exemplary ideas through and in which material being was created are angelic persons expressed through and in the eternally generated Son, who is "the first born of all creation" (Col. 1:15). It follows that the eternal ideas tied to creation *in concreto* are not free-floating abstractions, as they are for Plato, but are free and distinct personal beings given the breath of life by the very power of the Holy Spirit. God works in the world in and through the personal, celestial hierarchy that communicates, according to its own capacity, his interpersonal being.<sup>34</sup>

In Bouyer's own words, recommending a return to this patristic theology, which he considers to be quite compatible with both Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas, these spiritual beings, the angels who form the incorporeal world and who constitute the primary cosmos, are "the total and harmonious combination of the individual thoughts which God, in his Wisdom, chose to include in the one thought wherein he recognizes himself in the person of his Word and Son."<sup>35</sup> The physical

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 196. Yet Bouyer accepts William Norris Clarke's Thomist rejection of the realism of the divine ideas, an understanding of the divine ideas that was common in the tradition prior to Thomas. So, in order to put forth a consistent interpretation of Bouyer's own thinking, Bouyer's suggestions in regard to the "living nature" of the divine ideas would somehow have to be reconciled with Clarke's critique of the tradition that preceded Thomas. For Clarke on the divine ideas, cf. *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 236–37. Indeed, Clarke argues that the Christian Platonists failed to differentiate themselves from the neo-Platonists because they continued, like the neo-Platonists, to think of the divine ideas as "really real." This analysis by Clarke, in spite of Bouyer's commending of it, seems to contradict Bouyer's account of the difference between Christian theology and Plato on the divine ideas. But Bouyer, in fact, argues directly from Gregory of Nyssa in making his point. Gregory had recognized the "Christian distinction" in terms of these living ideas.

<sup>34</sup> Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 208.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

world is a secondary world, a concrete image of the angelic “symphony of light,” itself a created image of the uncreated light. The multiplicity of physical forms in this “secondary” cosmos reflects, through the materiality of nature, the angelic hierarchies. The laws that adapt these physical forms, and the life that fills them, find “an echo in the interplay of melodic changes in which the whole cosmos is involved in a single concert.”<sup>36</sup> Each type of body, in its microcosmic organization, “is like an inverted image of one of those angelic forms in the material mirror that is the web of the cosmos.”<sup>37</sup> Materiality, for man, is “the paradoxically translucent opacity” through which the exteriority of his world is open to cosmic being. For the angels, materiality is “the harmony of reciprocal distinctions in which they live.”<sup>38</sup>

Matter, in this way of seeing the cosmos, might be said to be a “hardened” or “condensed” expression of angelic praise, with an inherently sacramental significance for both angels and humans. On the one hand, matter is a gift to all created spirits, given to them by the Spirit of God as an instrument for the symbolic expression of infinite being within the finitude of creation. On the other hand, it is the immanent means by which created spirits communicate themselves to one another and lift their song of praise to the Creator. Matter serves, in this view, even considered within the immanent processes of creation and apart from human subjectivity, the function of linguistic expression. It is in its very essence an instrument of religious signification. The forms of the world in which matter subsists are so indicative of the angelic presences and reflective of them that the angels might be inferred from this account to be the universals of physical species. One might argue that for Bouyer the angels are operative universal causes of material beings, as they were for John Scotus Eriugena.<sup>39</sup> Yet Bouyer does not make any hard and fast decision in favor of Eriugena on this point. Like Newman’s angelology, Bouyer’s theology of the angels is more evocative than purely analytical. Like Newman, he does not provide a thoroughly worked out, Scholastic account of the causal power of the angels.

### A Note on the Angels and Philosophy

To see the material universe in the way that I have been discussing in this essay is extremely difficult for modern eyes, trained as they are to see

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>39</sup> On Eriugena, cf. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Volume III: Medieval Philosophy: From Augustine to Duns Scotus* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 116–35.

nature as a system of universal, immanent, impersonal laws. Admittedly, it requires the eyes of faith to “see” the invisible world, to understand creation as a song of praise, or to see the world as a reflection of the Light of Tabor. Modern Eastern Orthodox theologians often argue that *ratio* alone is unable to open our vision to these wider vistas. Only *nous* or *intellectus*, so this argument runs, formed by faith within the sacred liturgy of the Church, “sees” the invisible world, and even then only in an anticipatory, proleptic fashion. Yet, in the spirit of what Newman argues in “The Invisible World,” we might be able to formulate a tentative rational argument for the plausibility of the existence of that “other” world of angels and demons that Revelation discloses to us, which both Newman and Bouyer consider in fact to be but another aspect of our own world.

I wish here to bring into consideration the theology of a thinker whose work was eminently expressive of the English “Christian Platonism” by which Newman was partially formed and that Bouyer greatly admired. I refer to the enigmatic theology of Bishop Berkeley. As mentioned above, Cardinal Newman recognized in his *Apologia* that his “Sacramental system” calls to mind the figure of Berkeley. Bouyer himself, no doubt following clues in Newman’s sermons, turned directly to Berkeley’s writings, especially as interpreted by his distinguished modern exegete A. A. Luce, for insight into communicating the Sacramental system that he shared with Newman.<sup>40</sup> There is no question of giving a detailed exposition of Berkeley here. I must confine myself to Berkeley’s ultimate theological point in this regard, namely, his argument that if perception is to have veracity and meaning the universe must be filled with created spirits, whose ground can only be the uncreated triune Spirit of God.<sup>41</sup>

Berkeley’s immaterialism is ultimately a defense of the religious significance of perceptible nature. Though he denies that the modern concept of matter has objective reference, this denial is not a negation of the existence of a world external to human perception but in fact serves the purpose of affirming that objective physical nature is essentially fitted to the perceptions of created spirits. In his *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley makes this point in a passage of great beauty:

Are not the fields covered with a delightful verdure? Is there not something in the woods and groves, in the rivers and clear springs, that soothes, that delights, that transports the soul? At the prospect of the wide and deep ocean, or some huge mountain whose top is lost in the

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. A. Luce, *Sense Without Matter, or Direct Perception* (London: Nelson, 1954).

<sup>41</sup> The argument that follows works out briefly some of Bouyer’s own suggestions regarding Berkeley. Cf. Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 114–15; 132–34; 218; 222; 258.

clouds, or of an old gloomy forest, are not our minds filled with pleasing horror? Even in rocks and deserts, is there not an agreeable wildness? How sincere a pleasure is it to behold the natural beauties of the earth! To preserve and renew our relish for them, is not the veil of night drawn over her face, and doth she not change her dress with the seasons?<sup>42</sup>

This passage speaks of the world as ordered to human perception, of a world that communicates itself. The world exists for the purpose of our delight, our soothing, our horror, and our relishing. How repugnant to our intuitive understanding of the reality of our perception, if we truly understood its implications, must be the materialist philosophy that would take all of this away from us and in the process deny the very meaning and reality of physical nature itself.

Following in the direction of Berkeley's thought, we might wonder if it is plausible that in between the level of human personhood and divine personhood there exist in creation only impersonal things, whose very existence is to be perceived. Certainly, for Berkeley, all things exist in the divine mind and so are "perceived," even if human perception does not alight upon them. But does not the world that exists outside of human perception lack significance or meaning if it is not taken in, in some manner, by created spirit? Vast regions of nature would seemingly not be able to unfold their beauty and mystery for the delight and relishing of created spirit if it were only in the domains of human or divine perception that nature could accomplish its purpose. This may seem like an overly theological point, if one is seeking to establish the credibility of an angelic cosmology on the basis of natural reason, but it follows from the recognition that all things in creation exist in order to be perceived. This recognition, in turn, follows from a philosophical accounting of human perception that may have, if Alfred North Whitehead has taken the measure of the situation, so firm a basis that even Hume and Kant could not undo it.<sup>43</sup> The conclusion could be derived from these considerations that, in fact, the world must be filled with both human and angelic spirits if the very meaning of nature is to be unfolded, accomplished, and therefore comprehensible.

Of course, the foregoing argument is meant only to be suggestive and not to establish indubitably from a philosophical perspective the reality of the angels. It is meant to be taken as a possible, partial aid in one's assent

<sup>42</sup> George Berkeley, "Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous," in *The Empiricists* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 254–55.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 66–74.

to the Church's doctrine of the existence of the angels. But we might also briefly consider Saint Thomas's argument for the existence of the angels, an argument that he thought to have established a conclusion that is practically certain. Thomas, of course, understood quite deeply the cosmic importance of the angels in the Christian vision of faith, but, what is more, he saw angelology as a necessary doctrine of philosophy: "All corporeal things are governed by the angels. And this is not only the teaching of the holy doctors, but of all the philosophers."<sup>44</sup> According to Thomas, the existence of the angels follows from the existence, which we know from our experience, of grades of being. We know, Thomas argues, that there are grades of being below us in the material order, in the genera of plants and animals. Why not, then, he asks, admit the possibility of grades of being above us in the intellectual order? Human intellect, joined as it is to the body, is (he argues) the most imperfect of intellects. Like all imperfect genera, it points to the existence of more perfect exemplars in its genus and ultimately to the absolutely perfect exemplar—the divine intellect itself. Thomas argues that it is therefore impossible to believe that human intellect should be the only intellect, or even the only created intellect: the existence of the angels is thus credible on the grounds of natural reason.<sup>45</sup>

There is a parallel between Thomas's argument from the grades of being to the existence of the angelic intelligences and the Berkelian argument from the grades of perceptible being to the existence of the perceiving angels. Berkeley begins with the idealist starting point that all finite being exists in order to be perceived by (created) spirit, but this need not imply the doctrine of absolute subjective idealism. It need only imply, rather, that God has created the world for the express purpose of sharing his beauty and glory with those who are other than he. It need only imply that there are grades of perceiving intelligences in creation, whose respective powers correspond to the immense hierarchy of material forms, which is an idea whose lineage can be traced back in a Christian context at least far as Pseudo-Dionysius. Without recognition of these grades of intelligence, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to recover a sense of creation as a religious reality that communicates God's glory through the prism of its finitude.

### **Angelology and Liturgical Ascent**

I have emphasized thus far the universe as a place of reflected beauty and glory, illuminated by the vast hierarchy of created intelligences who form, as the great tradition tells us, the primordial chorus of praise to the

<sup>44</sup> *ST* I, q. 110, a. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 50, a. 1–2; *ScG* II, q. 91.

Creator. But this gives us only a part of the picture, and both of the Oratorian theologians under discussion here were well aware of this. If we are to see the angels in the light of the all-encompassing vision of the world and of history that was common to the Church Fathers, then we must see them in the drama of Christ. This requires seeing them in their connection to both man and the God-man. The universe, after all, not only is a symphony of praise but is marked by a battle between good and evil. No other modern theologians have understood this better than Newman and Bouyer. Indeed, this is so true of Newman that Bouyer could say of him that he saw the universe in “its dark face more fearsomely than perhaps any Christian thinker at any time.”<sup>46</sup> Newman had already recovered the ancient Christian monastic theology of cosmic and supra-cosmic spiritual warfare, and of the all the great twentieth-century Catholic theologians no one was as faithful to this monastic theology as Bouyer.

If we are to understand the angels in the shared theology of these two great Oratorians, which is thoroughly patristic in key, it is essential to take account with them of the spiritual conflict that exists at the very heart of created being. The universe was, by its very creation, meant to be a unanimous chorus of melodic praise to the Creator, self-diffusive of its own goodness in imitation of God’s eternal goodness and being.<sup>47</sup> This is the ultimate lesson to be derived from the patristic angelology that I described, with Newman and Bouyer, in the first section of this study. But it is obvious, from both common experience and from divine Revelation, that a dissonance has invaded this primordial chorus of praise, this harmony of self-giving. Newman and Bouyer uphold the traditional liturgical interpretation of divine Revelation, which tells us that the angels and the material universe formed a seamless web in the paradisaical state. All of creation was joined together in a unity of praise. The choir of the angels and the choir of physical creation were as one. However, the world as we now know it is fractured, divided, beset on all sides by the disintegrating effects of pride, greed, and egoism.

How is it that this has come to pass? It is not only the Fall of man that can account for this situation of sin and its cosmic effects. Divine Revelation tells us as much, but our own experience indicates that the cosmic scope of evil is inexplicable as a moral force if man is understood as the lone spiritual intelligence in the universe. Cosmic evil is tied to the first Adam, but, as the tradition tells us, it precedes even his creation. Bouyer

<sup>46</sup> Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 205. One sermon of Newman’s, in particular, portrays this “fear-somely dark” face of the universe: “Anthony in the Conflict,” in *Historical Sketches: Volume II* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1906), 94–111.

<sup>47</sup> Bouyer, *Cosmos*, 206.



develops Newman's angelology in that he takes as one of his central concerns the recovery of this story of cosmic Fall and Redemption in connection with the angels. The angels, he shows, are absolutely essential to the story, so much so that it cannot even be convincingly told without taking them into primary account.

The story of the cosmic Fall and Redemption is first of all a story of how, as Bouyer puts it, "a whole segment of the great mystic rose flowering around the Trinity has become detached and, as it were, torn open."<sup>48</sup> The highest of all God's creatures, the first among all the angels, has, out of pride and out of the desire for self-glorification, disturbed the heavenly and cosmic liturgy. Lucifer, and his lesser minions, have turned away from the divine Word, the eternal image of the Father and the source of all created being, and have directed their love only to themselves. These demonic beings have made it their goal to turn the lower hierarchies of creation from the glorification of the uncreated being of the Creator to the glorification of their own finite being. They have formed "a screen against the spontaneous movement of response which was rising up to the Creator from the most remote strata of creation."<sup>49</sup> The unified liturgy of heavenly and physical creation has been thrust into dissonance, reflected in the existence of cosmic evil.

The devil and his minions have cast a veil of darkness over the world, and they have turned the harmonious chorus of heavenly and cosmic praise into armies at war. However, it has never been within the power of these fallen angels to take full control over the material universe. Recall from the first section of this study that Bouyer holds that it is only by the will of the Creator that the thoughts of the angels could be given autonomous being. God is the Creator of both finite spirit, which is in the image of his eternal Son, and material being, which is in the image of the angelic images. Matter, as a projection of the angelic thoughts, is given over to the created stewardship of the angels, but because it is not their creature it is not completely tied to their authority. God, the one and only Creator of material being, has used this created resource—this image of a created image—as the instrument for bringing a new type of spirit into the world. Only this time, it is a spirit clothed in flesh, a spirit "who will embrace matter in the ascensional movement of its own creation, and will establish it once more in the cycle of thanksgiving, of the cosmic eucharist which has been frustrated by Satan."<sup>50</sup> The first

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<sup>48</sup> Louis Bouyer, *The Meaning of the Monastic Life*, trans. Kathleen Pond (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1955), 30.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Adam was, on this neo-patristic interpretation, a substitutionary angel. He was created to be a “new Lucifer,” taking his place in the heavenly choir and leading the “remote strata of creation” back to their eternal Source. The first Adam was a potential Redeemer, the potential new master of the earth, whose obedience and faithfulness to the Creator would have reintegrated the world in the praise of love that was the essential character of the primordial cosmos.

But, alas, the first Adam failed in his mission, and in his failure the earth has come “under a positive curse.”<sup>51</sup> However, God’s eternal will to rescue creation from its fallen condition was not thwarted by this second fall, and from the first instant of the Fall of the first Adam, God would prepare the world through his Spirit for the final victory of his love in the incarnation of the Second and Definitive Adam. God sends his eternal image directly into the world for its salvation. This salvific work is, in fact, a transfiguring accomplishment of the redemptive vocation of the first Adam. The first Adam was called to replace Satan in the choir of the angels. The Second Adam, the Son of Man, though possessing Adamic nature fully, has an incomparably greater status: “[T]he Son of Man, gathering up the whole of mankind in himself and retrieving the whole of creation in that humanity, is henceforth to be identified with the eternal leader of the heavenly choir: with the Word, with the eternal praise of the Father’s Love.”<sup>52</sup>

Christ, the Definitive Adam, is the eternal image of the Father. In his personal subsistence he is infinite self-gift and perfect thanksgiving. He is the eternal, personal Eucharist to the Father in the Spirit, and, by the power of his redemptive Cross, he draws mankind and all of creation directly into his perfect being of praise. He fulfills Adamic nature, but through the power of his divine personhood, in a manner that surpasses all conceivable expectations. He does not merely restore the paradisaical cosmic or heavenly liturgy. The Christian life, fulfilled in the New Adam, cannot be a simple return to the primordial chorus of praise. In his Resurrection, he restores the liturgy of physical creation. In his Ascension, he reunites the physical creation in man with the heavenly liturgy of the angels. But he does something incomparably greater. He draws all things directly into his own divine canticle of thanksgiving:

The cosmic liturgy is not indeed merely restored but reunited to its divine exemplar. Through the incarnation of the Word in humanity, which is itself an incarnation of the created spirit, all things are reca-

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

pitulated in their divine Model and the choir of spirits is gathered up into the very heart of the Godhead. Christ leads humanity back to the earthly paradise through the Resurrection: through the Ascension he brings it back to the angelic sphere whence the prince of this world had fallen to ruin. Finally, entering right into the heavenly sanctuary, he makes us sit down with him at God's right hand, he makes us, and the whole universe with us, re-enter heaven, taking us with him right to the very heart of the Father from whom all fatherhood proceeds. In the whole Christ, in the heavenly humanity of which Jesus is the head, man, associated with the angels' choir, is initiated into the very canticle of the Word himself.<sup>53</sup>

Christ unites human nature to himself in the hypostatic union and joins us personally to his eternal being, which is in fact one with the Eucharist of the Church. He brings us, and the cosmos, into the very heart of the Trinity. The Eucharistic liturgy is not only a sharing in the primordial cosmic and supra-cosmic liturgy; it is a "recapitulation" of it in Christ's eternal canticle of thanksgiving to the Father. Through man, an angel of substitution, Christ completes, in a transfiguring way, the liturgical mission of both man and angels.

The angelology that Bouyer brings forth thus teaches us a profound truth about our own being, a truth that is in danger of being lost to the extent that strongly de-mythologizing currents of thought still predominate in Catholic theology. It teaches us that the very reason for our existence is ascent to the light of the divine sanctuary. The Christian life is essentially "ascensional." It is exemplified or lived to its fullest degree in the monastic vocation, which is misunderstood if it is not seen as a life of angelic ascent. The Christian life is a joining in the choirs of heaven, and, even more, it is ordered in its essence to beatific vision. It is a breaking of all ties with the earth—so that, as Bouyer emphasizes in his many books, the earth itself may be rescued from bondage to the Prince of Darkness. A strongly developed, realistic angelology is essential for us to grasp the very meaning of our vocation as Christians. A truly "integral humanism" would be, as Bouyer often says, an "eschatological humanism."<sup>54</sup> Our life must be oriented to the Rising Sun (or Son) of the East, who draws us, as angels of substitution, out of enslavement to sin and egoism and brings us to the true and eternal Garden of the Orient, the otherwise unapproachable temple of his divinity.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Louis Bouyer, *Le métier de théologien: Entretiens avec Georges Daix* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2005), 187–208.

### Conclusion

I wish to conclude this study by introducing a new argument. I wish to argue, albeit very briefly, for the practical importance of the angelology that has been described here. The Church Fathers clearly understood that it is through acknowledging the presence of the angelic beings that God's glory is experienced in the cosmos and our own being is experienced in its historical meaning. In other words, it is only by "seeing" the presence of the angels in creation through faith in the divine Word that we are able to understand the purpose for our existence. A realistic angelology is thus of great significance for our daily lives. Both Newman and Bouyer are surely correct to affirm the patristic teaching in this regard—and in explicit contrast to the utilitarian vision of the universe held by modern man. They each help us to see in their "neo-patristic" angelology that all of creation is essentially liturgical, and that the inner meaning of all things is ultimately revealed only in the light of the Christian Eucharist.<sup>55</sup>

The two Oratorians discussed in this study rightly see it as of the utmost religious significance to uphold a realistic doctrine of the angels in this age of fragmentation and dissolution. Their bold exposition of the doctrine of the angels forces us to confront our sense of what is socially and cosmically important. They bring us to a profound consideration of the connection of knowledge and activity, or reason and life, which is a persistent concern in the modern age. Newman and Bouyer each compel us to question, in seeing the cosmos in the light of the angels, whether the world should be thought of merely as an instrument for man's material progress and whether God is of interest to man only insofar as his providence supports man's earthly aspirations.

The angelology that I have described in this study gets at the very heart of the Church's life in sacred liturgy and addresses perhaps the greatest challenge that the Church has faced in the modern age. The challenge of which I speak is the emergence of a sense among the mass of Christians in the West that sacred liturgy is a mere fossil, a useless antiquity with no relevance for life in the world today. Those many liturgists in the past half-century who have tried to make sacred liturgy more "relevant" by making it more horizontal have themselves contributed to this condition of fallen Christian consciousness. But the ultimate reason why many Christians have come to think or to feel that liturgy is of little importance for daily life is mostly a matter of resignation. They have accepted as an irreversible situation the fact that the cosmos has been

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Bouyer, *Newman's Vision of Faith: A Theology for Times of General Apostasy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 72–90.

given over in modern thought and culture entirely to scientists and to empirical and mathematical investigation of its processes. Too many Christians are resigned to the idea that the cosmos can no longer be seen as bearing any religious significance, and they are prone to think of the universe as nothing more than a spatio-temporal grid in which insentient bodies bump into each other. Indeed, many Christians, without even giving it a second thought, have come to think of modern man's utilitarian technology, which is in many ways just a new and particularly effective form of magic, as the most significant action by which man relates to the universe.

The liturgical and sacramental angelology of the Church Fathers, which has no greater modern exponents than Newman and Bouyer, is the remedy for undoing the Christian capitulation to this technological concept of the world. The recovery of this realistic angelology is of the most pressing significance for re-instilling in Christian consciousness a proper sense of the universal significance of the Church's sacred liturgy. Modern technology is only of secondary importance in human existence. It is not the human action most in accord with the true lines of force by which the cosmos is sustained in its being. The universe is, to paraphrase Bouyer, essentially personal in character, and it can thus be understood in its deepest essence only in the personal categories of self-gift and diffusive goodness as described in the first section of this study. Liturgical praise is thus the human action that most fully aligns our being to the very truth of cosmic reality.

We can conclude from all of this, in addressing the unfortunate distortion in modern Christian consciousness just described, that science and technology, although important human occupations, are not the most cosmically important activities of man. They can remain humanist practices, and in touch with the truth of cosmic being, only if they are seen in relation to their liturgical ordering in created existence. A cosmology and anthropology of the angels, which explicitly and forthrightly sees the presence of these first created ministers of the divine will in and beyond the processes of nature, helps to keep our vision focused on the liturgical meaning of all things. It helps, furthermore, to orient our vision and earthly activities centrally and essentially toward that "recapitulating" liturgy—the very redemptive action of the divine within history and the cosmos—which sums up creation in a transfiguring manner: the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ in his Church. The Oratorian angelology of Newman and Bouyer is thus of the greatest practical importance. **NV**