

The Book of Crumbs □
Musings On The Last Nine Nativity Years
Excerpts

Draft

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Musings On The Last Nine Nativity Years

- I. Preface
- II. Introduction -
- III. At My Ordination
- IV. On Leadership, Romanticism, & God
- V. God & The Divine Liturgy
- VI. On Defining Theology & Spirituality
- VII. The Greatest Commandment
 - a. It's All About The Children
 - b. Adults: A Willingness to Grow?
- VIII. Our World At War
 - a. The Devil's Ways
- IX. On Teaching
 - a. Toward a Theology on Guardian Angels
 - b. The Faith of Our Fathers
 - c. The Theology of Ingratitude: The Meaning of Heresy or The Heresy of Meaning
- X. The Bible
 - a. The Word of God vs God in the Word
 - b. Arguing – On Who's Terms
 - c.
- XI. Beauty
- XII. On Learning How to Die –
 - a. “Death is not extinguishing the light. It is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.” (Tagore)
 - b. “This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.” St Isaac of Syria

The Book of Crumbs □
(An Excerpt)
Preface

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Introduction

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Homily At My Ordination

On this day, the third Sunday of Pascha, we celebrate the memory of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women. We also commemorate St. Joseph of Arimathea, who was one of the seventy secret Apostles. We also remember St. Nicodemus, who came to Christ at night and was one of the leaders of the Jews.

We remember the women because they were the first to truthfully bear witness to the Resurrection...while Joseph and Nicodemus were the first to bear witness to the burial of Christ.

Nicodemus was immediately banished from the synagogue by the Jews and was forbidden to rejoin them. It is said that Nicodemus was the first to proclaim in detail what had occurred at the Passion and Resurrection of Christ.

After burying the Body of Jesus, Joseph was thrown into a deep pit by the Jews; however, by the grace of God, he was delivered from it and went to his estate in Arimathea. It was while he was at the estate that Christ showed Himself to Joseph, confirming the mystery of the Resurrection.

And then we have the Myrrhbearers. Since that fateful Friday was the day before the Passover...Joseph and Nicodemus struggled to bury the Lord's Body before the Passover. They could only succeed by burying the Body quickly – by quickly applying aloes and a bit of myrrh before wrapping Him and laying him in Joseph's tomb. Joseph gave his own tomb to hold the most pure Body of Christ.

Because he was buried so quickly, the women in their fervent love for Christ purchased expensive ointments, myrrh-oils, and came to the tomb to anoint Him properly and fulfill all that had been omitted due to the hurried manner of the burial.

When they arrived at the tomb, they saw many signs, such as two radiant angels who were inside the tomb and another who was seated on the stone. They then saw Christ...but Mary Magdalene thought He was the gardener and inquired concerning the Lord's body – she thought It had been taken away. After informing the Disciples, she returned to the tomb and wept.

She wept because of the burning fire of love within her. She longed for Him whom she thought had been taken away. She wept.

At first she sought but did not find...and she wept. Her "soul...thirsted for the living God." Yet she persevered and found what she was looking for.

A number of years ago...I, too, wept. I, too, thirsted. I, too, was seeking. In fact, I was struggling.

And as our Lord asked Mary Magdalene, "Why are you weeping?...Whom do you seek?"...so, too, was I asked the same questions.

His Eminence gave me the answers when he told me, "God was calling you...but you were not listening." Your Eminence, you were right.

**The Book of Crumbs □
(Excerpted)
God & The Divine Liturgy**

Describing God...

It is impossible to describe God. All words are inadequate. Any thoughts are fleeting. All images are imaginings. All emotions are not enough; no emotion is sufficiently overwhelming enough to capture God's love and grace.

There are words in the liturgy, said by the priest, that alone are a course of study:

“You are God *ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing yet ever the same*. You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us out of non-existence into being and, when we had fallen, You raised us up again, and left nothing undone to lead us to heaven and bestow upon us Your future kingdom.” (Emphasis added.)

The foregoing words are at the heart of our Orthodox Christian faith.

Liturgical Prayer...

“*Lex orandi, lex credendi*” – the law of prayer is the law of belief; in other words, what we pray is what we believe. This axiom has its origins in St. Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390 – ca. 463). Our Divine Liturgy is at the heart – it is at the center – of our beliefs. All of our theology derives from our liturgy and the prayers within. The Latin “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” has its origins in “*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*” meaning “Let the law of prayer establish the law of belief.” Truly what we pray, the very words – despite their inadequacy – is reflective of our beliefs.

When we, specifically the priests at Divine Liturgy, pray of God being “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing yet ever the same” we believe – we must believe if we are truly Orthodox – in these words. Our words are not mere words, they are our faith.

The Myth of Liturgical stasis...

Our Divine Liturgy is well defined. It has been for centuries. To say, however, that our Divine Liturgy is unchanging is an error. It has changed; perhaps the more accurate word is ‘evolved.’ Fr. Larry, my seminary instructor, often stated, “we can add to the liturgy, but we cannot take away from it.” What he means by this, I believe, is that we *have* altered the liturgy over time and the altering is usually in the form of ‘adding’ but once ‘added to,’ taking away from the liturgy is difficult, if not impossible. For this reason any changes must be prudent and undertaken with caution.

There are multiple early versions of the liturgy, certainly the Acts of the Apostles, the corpuses of Paul, and the writings of the nun Egeria suggest such. Indeed liturgical worship was, in the beginning as it is today, the heart of our faith.

Jerusalem, given the historical significance it holds in our faith, resulted in the Liturgy of St. James the Brother of Our Lord becoming a liturgical showpiece resulting in the practice and prayers being carried through Christendom. From this liturgy, came forth the liturgies of Ss. John Chrysostom and Basil.

Another Liturgical Myth...

There is a myth that must be dispelled. It is believed, given the testimony of Proclus, Bishop of Constantinople, 434-446 A.D., that St. Basil shortened the lengthy Liturgy of St. James, and that St. Chrysostom shortened the St. Basil's liturgy. This *is* a myth and without basis in fact, save Proclus' apparent testimony to the contrary.

Jesuit scholar F.J. Leroy has amply demonstrated that a 16th century forger, Constantin Palaocappa, falsified Proclus' testimony. Additionally, Dom Hieronymus Edgberding of the Coesfeld Benedictine monastery, in 1931, demonstrated that the anaphoras in St. Basil's liturgy evolved from shorter to longer forms. This alone contradicts the myth of St. Basil shortening the Liturgy of St. James. Finally, no scholar of repute has challenged the foregoing conclusions.

What this effectively means is that the liturgies of Ss. Basil and Chrysostom more likely evolved independently, based on that of St. James, according to the individual reworking of the saints.

The Elements of the Liturgy...

The Liturgies of Ss. Basil and Chrysostom consist of three sections: the *Ordering*, *Liturgy of Catechumens*, and *Liturgy of the Faithful*.

The *Ordering* is also known as the *Prokomide* (Byzantine/Greek) or *Proskomedia* and the *Prosthesis*. It is the rite of preparation of the bread and wine before the liturgy is celebrated. The priest conducts this, usually before anyone arrives at the parish. The priest takes the *prosphora*, the round leavened bread bearing the inscription IC, XC, NI, KA (Jesus Christ conquers) and a cross, and saying prayers prepares the lamb and wine for later communion during the liturgy. It is important to note, because I know I will be challenged, that prosthesis, in addition to the rite of celebration, also means a place in the sanctuary as well as the table on which the *ordering* occurs.

The *Liturgy of the Catechumens* is that portion at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy that includes the singing of psalms and the reading of Epistle and Gospel. It was during this time that, historically, catechumens – ‘learners’ or ones being instructed in the rudiments of the Christian faith – could be present during the liturgy. After this point, the catechumens had to exit the church proper, standing outside the doors, while the baptized Christians could partake of the remainder of the liturgy.

The *Liturgy of the Faithful* is that portion of the Divine Liturgy involving the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. Originally closed to catechumens, today this is not the case. The *Liturgy of the Faithful* begins immediately after the reading of the Gospel or Homily, if given after the Gospel reading.

The Liturgies of Ss. Basil and Chrysostom...

The differences between the two liturgies are essentially absent to the faithful. The differences are in the private prayers said by the priest. For the priest, the differences are significant.

The normative liturgy during the ecclesiastical year is the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The Liturgy of St. Basil is proclaimed ten times yearly: January 1st – the Feast Day of St. Basil, Epiphany Eve, the first five Sundays of Lent, on Thursday and Saturday of Holy Week, and on Nativity Eve.

Our Good God...

One of the things that most bothered me after the premeditated and abominable September 11, 2001 attacks were so-called Christians going on television stating that the murderous aggression was the result of God’s wrath; this because of the moral decay in our society. This is wrong, very wrong.

We, Orthodox Christians, believe that God is good. He is not wrathful. Not vengeful. Not angry. And we state this conclusion repeatedly within our liturgy. Thus if anyone – any Orthodox Christian – should state that God is otherwise, they are not attentive to our liturgy.

At the prayer of the Gospel procession the priest prays:

“O Lord, our Master and God, Who in heaven established orders and armies of angels and archangels for the service of Your glory, make this our entrance to be an entrance of holy angels, serving together with us and with us glorifying Your **goodness**. For to You are due all glory, honor and adoration, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.” (Emphasis added.)

In the Trisagion prayer the priest prays:

“O Holy God, Who abide among the Saints, Who are praised by the thrice-holy voice of the Seraphim and glorified by the Cherubim and adored by all the heavenly hosts, Who brought all things into being out of nothing, Who made man to Your own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26), and adorned him with Your every gift, giving wisdom and understanding to him who asks (II Chronicles 1:10) and not neglecting the sinner, but prescribing penance for his salvation: granting to us, Your humble and unworthy servants, even at this moment to stand before the glory of Your holy Altar (Jude 24) and offer You due worship and glory, O Master, accept from the lips of us sinners the thrice-holy hymn and visit us in Your **goodness**. Forgive us all

our sins, both voluntary and involuntary. Sanctify our souls and bodies and grant that we may serve You in holiness all the days of our lives (Luke 1:74-75), through the prayers of the holy Birth-giver of God and of all the Saints, who have pleased You from the beginning of time.” (Emphasis added.)

After the Great Entrance, the priest again prays:

“O Lord God Almighty, Who alone are holy, Who alone accepts the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15) from those who call upon You with their whole heart (Psalm 9:2), accept also the prayer of us sinners and bring us to Your holy Altar. Enable us to present to You gifts and spiritual sacrifices (I Peter 2:5) for our own sins and for the faults of the people. (Hebrews 9:7). Make us worthy to find favor in Your sight that our sacrifice may be acceptable to You (Romans 15:16) and that the *good* Spirit of Your grace (Hebrews 10:29) may rest upon us and upon these gifts and upon all Your people.” (Emphasis added.)

At the Litany of Supplication the priest and people pray: “For all that is *good* and profitable to our souls, and for the peace of the world, let us beseech the Lord.” (Emphasis added.) Certainly only good can come from a good God.

At the Amvon prayer the priest intones:

“O Lord, Who blesses those who bless You (Genesis 12:3) and sanctifies those who put their trust in You, save Your people and bless Your inheritance (Psalm 28:9), preserve the fullness of Your Church, sanctify those who love the beauty of Your House (Psalm 26:8), glorify them by Your divine might, and forsake us not who put our hope in You. Grant peace to Your world, to Your churches, to Your priests, to the honorable government of our country, its armed forces and to all Your people. For every *good* and perfect gift is from above, coming down from You, the Father of lights (James 1:17), and to You we give glory and thanksgiving and worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, always now and ever and forever.” (Emphasis added.) Only a good God can give us good things.

If God were wrathful, vengeful, and angry by the very definition of “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*” we, the priest and the faithful, could not intone the foregoing words. Indeed the words we would pray would, by definition, be very different.

The Book of Crumbs □
(Excerpted)
The Greatest Commandment:
According to the Church Fathers

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him.
"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him,
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

Matthew 22:34-40¹

With these words our Lord Jesus Christ set forth a commandment and standard of conduct that is above all others: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." How profound is His commandment? How profound is it in terms of its literalness and spirituality?

The word "love" appears nearly 600 times in the Bible, but only 11 times in the Gospel of Matthew.² Its appearance in Matthew 22: 37 and 39 – during the final week before our Lord's crucifixion – is of such significance as to be simple, yet enigmatic. To love God is simple. To love God who is love³ means loving love – the very nature of God. To this Jesus adds: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This revelation was nothing short of revolutionary. Its comprehension was beyond the realm of understanding for the audience of the day. Its understanding today is no less a challenge. Its fulfillment is our challenge. This paper will posit and contrast the literal and spiritual sense of Christ's words and the challenge before us today.

The Literal Context

Instead of a political or warrior-like Messiah to deliver the Hebrews from the yoke of the Romans, a humble Jesus arrived aboard a donkey on Palm Sunday. Despite being hailed as the Messiah⁴, the disbelieving Jewish religious leadership immediately confronts Him. First it was the "chief priests and the elders"⁵ – the Pharisees⁶, then the Sadducees⁷, only to be followed once again by the Pharisees⁸, led by a lawyer. Being the *scriptural experts*, the Pharisees had found 613 commandments in the Old Testament. And they argued *ad infinitum* about which of the 613 commandments was the greatest. This was the trap they sought to present our Lord – to pose a question that was unanswerable.

Jesus did not side step the question, He responded boldly. Knowing full well that their motives were malicious, He not only gave them the greatest commandment but an additional one to solidify and reorient their faith and understanding: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And a *second* is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these *two* commandments depend all the law and the prophets." [Emphasis added.] But His teaching – His revelation – went beyond the capability of the Hebrew religious leadership to comprehend – despite the simplicity of our Lord's pronouncement and teaching. The question for us, today, is: are we capable of understanding and abiding by these commandments?⁹

¹ All biblical references are from the Revised Standard Version.

² The word "love" in Matthew appears in: Matt 5:43; 5:44; 5:46; 5:46.; 6:5; 6:24; 19:19; 22:37; 22:39; 23:6; 24:12.

³ 1 John 4:8.

⁴ Matt 21:9.

⁵ Matt 21:23.

⁶ Matt 21:45.

⁷ Matt 22:23.

⁸ Matt 22:34.

⁹ The Lord's commandment was not that different from the one articulated in Deuteronomy 6:5: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they mind, and with all thy soul, and all they strength." *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*:

Jesus' literal teaching is as applicable to us today as it was to the Hebrews of His day. Only in loving God and our neighbor can we move along the path of life that God intended for us to be on. Only in loving God and our neighbor can we become more like God.

The Spiritual Sense

Building on the literal, the spiritual sense and meaning of the greatest commandment was best depicted by Origen and Ss. Chrysostom and Augustine.

That Jesus "had silenced the Sadducees" was, for Origen, an affirmative action inasmuch as it showed "that the brightness of truth will impose silence on the voice of falsehood."¹⁰ The "brightness of truth" had silenced the opponents twice, yet the Hebrews religious leadership kept coming forward to challenge Jesus. Truth would silence them once again.

The opponents of truth came forward – again – this time "to defeat Him by numbers Whom they could not defeat by reason: arming themselves with numbers...." Numbers did not and will not prevail against the Truth. Instead "they confess themselves naked of truth."¹¹

"And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him question, to test him." It should be known that the "test" was perhaps an attempt to *tempt* our Lord. St. Augustine, seeing the situation positively, believes that "the Lord's answer may have changed him" who was asking the question. St. Augustine adds that we need not take the tempting "in a bad sense, as though he were trying to trap an enemy, but rather as a careful approach to one unknown to him whom he wishes to test."¹² This is one possible perspective.

However, Origen believes that in calling Jesus "teacher" the lawyer *is* tempting Christ "since he did not utter the word as a Disciple of Christ."¹³ Origen goes on to say that any person who calls on the "master" and does not seek *to learn or give of himself* with his whole heart "is a brother of the Pharisee."¹⁴ The same condemnation may well apply to us today.

St. Chrysostom affirms Origen's assessment when he (Chrysostom) states that the Pharisee "asks concerning the great commandment, who had not begun to observe the least."¹⁵ In other words, there could be no positive motive associated with the lawyer's question.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest commandment. St. Chrysostom points out that it is important to note that Jesus does not say we are to fear God; rather we should love him. If we were commanded to fear God we would be "slaves." Our actions would be ones of subservience. Our actions would be forced. In contrast, to love God is to be His children. Whereas fear would spring from coercion, love emanates from freedom.¹⁶ And freedom requires an action of giving on our part, not an obligation to obedience. It is this very freedom, the freedom to act affirmatively, which creates and strengthens the bond between mankind and God. Why? Because "God...does not wish that men should fear Him, in a servile manner...but love Him as a Father."¹⁷ Only by loving God can we begin to have the relationship with Him that He originally envisioned for us.

Greek and English by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson) 1998. Although "not that different," unless the listener's heart is open to learning – the lesson will not be heard. This was the case for the Hebrews.

¹⁰ Origen, *Tr. 23 in Matthew, The Early Church Fathers on CD-ROM*. Harmony Media, Inc. 2000.

¹¹ St. Chrysostom, *Opus Imperfectum 42, The Early Church Fathers on CD-ROM*. Harmony Media, Inc. 2000.

¹² St. Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels, Book II, The Early Church Fathers on CD-ROM*. Harmony Media, Inc. 2000.

¹³ Origen, *op cit.*

¹⁴ Origen, *ibid.*

¹⁵ St. Chrysostom, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ St. Chrysostom, *ibid.*

¹⁷ St. Chrysostom, *ibid.*

To love God “with all your heart, and with all your soul” means that nothing should be between God and us. “To love God...means to keep the soul steadfast in truth, and to be firm in faith.”¹⁸ Here St. Chrysostom distinguishes between love of the heart and love of the soul. Love of the heart is felt whereas love of the soul is perceived. It is the combination of the two – heart and soul, which enable us to love God with “our whole heart” – our total being. But there is one condition: “For he who believes that with God is all good, and that outside of Him there is nothing of good, he loves God with his whole heart.”¹⁹ In other words, we *must* believe that “God *is* all good” [emphasis added] and “outside of Him there is nothing good.” To do otherwise – to disbelieve – is to not know God, is contrary to the nature of God. This perspective was new to the Hebrews and as a consequence they could not comprehend our Lord’s teaching.

Origen defines this greater love of our “whole heart” as being in all thought, action, and remembrance. In agreeing with St. Chrysostom (albeit Origen preceded him), Origen states that loving God with our whole mind means “bringing forth nothing but what is of God.” He goes on to say that loving God with our whole soul means that we must be “ready to lay it down in the service of God.”²⁰ We must love God with the totality of our being by giving ourselves to Him.

Loving God with our whole heart – the totality of our being – is the greatest commandment before man. “The Lord replies that it is not only the greatest, but also the first; not in Scriptural order, but in the order of the dignity of its virtue.”²¹

The second commandment – “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” – applies to every man. St. Augustine is clear that “every man is to be regarded as our neighbor.”²² In this regard we must remember “our Lord also willed to be called our neighbor.”²³ We cannot be selective about this commandment. As hard as it might be, it is our obligation.

St. Chrysostom’s perspective on the second commandment is that because man is created in God’s image, loving man is akin to loving God.²⁴ In this sense the two commandments are interrelated and may be perceived as one.

“On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” By this statement Jesus is reinforcing the basic fundamental nature of the commandments. The entire Decalogue (as well as the 613 commandment discerned by the Pharisees!) depends on the commandments pronounced by Jesus. St. Augustine states such in *The Trinity* where he writes:

Since there are two precepts on which depend the whole law and the prophets:
The love of God, and of our neighbor, not without reason does Scripture frequently put one in place of both. Either the love of God, as in the words: *And we know that to them that love God all things work together unto good*; or the love of our neighbor, as in the words: *All the law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself* (Rom. 8:28; Gal. 5:14). And the reason is that if a man loves his neighbor, then he will also love God; for it is from one and the same love that we love God and our neighbor; God however, for His own sake; ourselves and our neighbor, for God’s sake.²⁵

In essence St. Augustine is wrapping up everything written by Origen and St. Chrysostom. The two commandments are inseparable. They are the basis of all the Lord’s commandments.

¹⁸ St. Chrysostom, *ibid.*

¹⁹ St. Chrysostom, *ibid.*

²⁰ Origen, *op. cit.*

²¹ Origen, *ibid.*

²² St. Augustine, *Doctrina Christiana*, I, *The Early Church Fathers on CD-ROM*. Harmony Media, Inc. 2000.

²³ St. Augustine, *ibid.*

²⁴ St. Chrysostom, *op. cit.*

²⁵ St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, VIII, *The Early Church Fathers on CD-ROM*. Harmony Media, Inc. 2000.

“On these *two* commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” One might ask how this is so? How can the “laws” in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy rest on these two commandments? How can the 613 laws discerned and endlessly argued over by the Pharisees rest on two foundational commandments? Origen gave the best answer.

This to me appears to be the meaning of the passage in question. He who fulfils all that is written concerning the love of God and his neighbour is worthy of receiving the highest of God’s favours, of which the first is *the word of wisdom* through the Holy Spirit, through which comes *the word of knowledge* according to the same Spirit (I Cor. xii, 8). Made worthy of all these gifts he rejoices in the wisdom of God, his heart filled with the love of God, his whole soul illumined by the light of knowledge, and his whole mind by the word of God. And receiving such gifts from God, he now truly understands that the whole law and the prophets are but part of all the wisdom and knowledge of God, and understands that the whole law and the prophets depend on, and have as their beginning the love of the Lord God and of our neighbor, and that the perfect fulfillment of our duty to God consists in love.²⁶

Conclusion

What the Pharisees did not understand, and what we should understand, is that Jesus was transcending the totality of commandments. Love is the very essence of divine life. It ought to be the essence of human life. Love is the benchmark by which we should measure of our spiritual growth.

It bears stating once again; only in loving God and our neighbor can we become more like God.

²⁶ Origen, *op. cit.*

**The Greatest Commandment:
According to the Church Fathers**

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The Book of Crumbs □
(An Excerpt)
Our World At War:
A Warfare Theodicy

And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"
And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.
Mark 4:39

And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil..."
Matthew 13.36-39

Our world is at war. The September 11 atrocities are but another manifestation of the cosmic conflict – the combat zone – we live in. When the attacks of September 11th occurred, some misguided commentators said the events were part of God's divine plan. These same commentators would also have us believe that when disease or harm befalls someone it is within God's plan. Do not listen to anyone who tells you such a thing.

Why did the September atrocities occur? To answer this question we must understand the world we live in.

Let us look at Holy Scripture. The cosmic war in the Old Testament is depicted as an unyielding nature to God's will. The sea in the Old Testament is often depicted as hostile waters and a sinister force challenging God and His creation. It is against this unyielding nature that God's power and rebuke cause hostile waters to flee (Ps 104.7, 77.16). God, in setting forth boundaries for the hostile waters (Ps 104.9; Prov 8.27-29; cf. Job 38.6-11) protects His creation as He sits above "the mighty waters" (Ps 29.3-4, 10).

But in the Old Testament it is more than nature that is rebelling against God. There are monsters challenging His authority. The many headed Leviathan (Ps 74.14) capable of breathing fire (Job 41.18-21) and eating iron and bronze (Job 41.26-27) could, without God's intervention, consume man (Ps 74.13-14). The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the day God would crush the Leviathan.

"In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." Isaiah 27.1.

The Rahab was similarly portrayed in the Old Testament as a creature challenging God. Living in the waters encircling the earth, it, too, would be defeated by God (Job 26.12-13; Ps 89.9-10). Again it was Isaiah who reminded the people that as God had defeated Rahab, He would deliver Israel (Is 51.9).

In the Old Testament Satan is rarely mentioned; he is, nevertheless, present. Satan was present at man's Fall (Gen 3) as a serpent. It was through him that "death entered the world" (Wis 2.24), Saul and Job were tormented (1 Sam 18.10 and the Book of Job, respectively), and Joshua was accused (Zech 3.1-2).

In other words, because of an unyielding and evil nature and Satan, the Old Testament authors did not assume things always heeded God's plan. God today, as in the Old Testament, endures consistent assaults on His authority.

This warfare theme continues into and is more developed within the New Testament. It is in the midst of the great cosmic war that the Son of God enters our lives as our Saviour.

The big difference between the Old and New Testaments is that instead of dragons, serpents, raging waters, and oblique references to Satan, Jesus specifically refers to Satan as the "ruler of this world" (Jn 12.31, 14.30, 16.11). He is the cause of all the evils we endure. The Holy Apostles John and Paul also confirm that Satan is the power of this world (1 Jn 5.19; 2 Cor 4.4).

Jesus, while acknowledging the evil princehood of Satan and his legion of followers (Mt 9.34, 25.41), tells us that we, too, must battle Satan (Mk 3.27). Because this world, rightfully, belongs to its Creator, we, as Jesus did, must battle to give it back to the Father. This is what Jesus was doing when He was teaching, exorcising demons, and healing the ill. By His death and resurrection Jesus was attaining a victory over Satan and his legions by defeating the very death that Satan had brought to man.

The incarnation of the Son of God served to reclaim the earth for the Father by establishing His Holy Church. The presence of the Holy Spirit within the Holy Church – the Orthodox Church – established God’s kingdom on earth as a direct challenge to the “ruler of this world.”

Recall when Jesus taught the apostles to pray that God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6.10) this presupposed that God’s will is not being done on earth! And it is not. Therefore, when people die or are suffering from a disease or filled with a demon, they are casualties of war – the great cosmic war surrounding us. Therefore, the atrocities of September 11 do not serve a divine purpose. We truly live in the midst of a combat zone. God does not will ill for mankind. Indeed, there is no scriptural or patristic teaching that God ordains or promotes evil (despite comments to the contrary by prominent clergymen). God is good. This is why the Son of God “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Act 10.38). Jesus’ acts of healing were acts against satanic oppression.

The warfare perspective in Holy Scripture is sustained by the early Church Fathers. Justin Martyr refers to “the care of men & of all things under heaven to angels whom He [God] appointed over them” and angels who transgressed against God (*2 Apology* 5). The concept that angels would “exercise providence for God over the things created and ordered by Him” was similarly echoed by Athenagoras (*A Plea for the Christians*) and reinforced by Origen (*Against Celsus*). Therefore, if nature – the things of the earth – and man are hostile to God it is because of the misguided and hostile free will of the fallen angels. Tatian wrote that while only God is “the nature of good,” man and the angels have a perfected “freedom of choice” (*Address to the Greeks*). Misuse of free will by both man and angels has resulted in a great rebellion with tragic circumstances.

One might ask if Christ’s death and resurrection defeated Satan, why then is the earth still oppressed? The answer is that Satan has not yielded. Even after establishing His Holy Church God continued and continues to encounter strong resistance. Again, why? Irenaeus gave the best possible response, “there is no coercion with God” (*Against Heresies* 5.37). God gives us the responsibility to determine our destiny. Many a man – and a fallen angel – has opted to rebel against God. The result is war. Only a God whose love is unbounded and uncompromising would willingly accept rejection by some, knowing well that there will also be responding love by others. We need only live our Orthodox faith understanding that He will not fail us as we participate in this cosmic war – as His warriors – simply by loving Him.

In this war God is our champion. That is, He is our champion, if we are allied with Him.

Remember, this war will not last forever. And when it ends, God’s victory will be fully evident.

The Book of Crumbs □
(Excerpted)
**Toward a Theology on Guardian Angels:
According To The Church Fathers**²⁷

Guardian angels, everyone seems to like them. Many believe in them. There are guardian angel books, lapel pins, statues and figurines, music, movies, drawings, and paintings. Run a query on “angels” at Amazon.com and you will receive a listing of 5044 items of which 3057 are books. Run a query at the same site for “guardian angels” and 347 items will be listed with 122 books for your consideration. They are, today, more a novelty and curiosity than a truth. And that is unfortunate.

The subject of guardian angels should not be trivialized. Today’s commercialization of guardian angels is not reality. The trivialization of so critical a topic serves Satan’s objectives.

Guardian angels are “companions of the faithful.”²⁸ Guardian angels are our “shepherds”²⁹ with us throughout every second, minute, and hour of every day of our lives. Next to God, our guardian angel knows us better than anyone in our lives inasmuch as they are with us throughout our lives! As a consequence it would not be surprising to learn that our guardian angels exult in our spiritual growth. Similarly, they may weep at our spiritual failures.³⁰ We are never abandoned or alone. And this is important because man lives in a supernatural world – in the midst of “a spiritual combat between the powers of light and the powers of darkness.”³¹ One who believes in the Triune God *must* believe in angels. One who believes in angels *must* believe in guardian angels. The foregoing two premises are

²⁷ The title of this paper is deliberately chosen. The first word of the title – “toward” – has been used because this paper is not a definitive work. Rather it is intended to be an initial step, albeit a very modest one, toward a larger effort on guardian angels. Therefore, the paper should be read in light of this objective.

²⁸ St. Basil, *Adv. Eun.*, 3, 1. Please note: where no page number is provided with regard to references to the writings of the Church Fathers, it is because the information was extracted from the CD-ROM, entitled: *The Early Church Fathers*, Harmony Media, Inc., 2000.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ It is important to state upfront that this conclusion is contrary to that of St. Thomas Aquinas who stated: “Angels do not grieve, either for sins or for the pains inflicted on men.” Yet St. Thomas does state “in man’s repentance and in man’s sin there is one reason for the angel’s joy, namely the fulfillment of the ordering of the Divine Providence.” (Emphasis added.) *Summa Theologica, First Part, Question 113, Article 7.* Joy is a positive emotion. It is perhaps worth pointing out that Jean Danielou, S.J., in Chapter 4 of *The Angels and Their Mission* attributes overwhelming joy, astonishment, and exaltation to the angels at the Ascension of Christ. In this case positive emotions are also attributed to the angels. My conclusion, however, is that angels can and do possess emotions akin to sorrow, weeping, and sadness. To support this conclusion I rely on tradition and the axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*. In the Orthodox Christian *Canon to the Guardian Angel*, Ode 4, we pray the following to our guardian angel: “Grow not weary of me” and “O my guide, abide with me in forbearance.” In Ode 5 we pray “Foreseeing the torments and punishments awaiting me and *pitying* my callousness, insensibility, and blindness, thou *sighest* and *grievest* and *lamentest*, being filled with mourning, O my deliverer.” [Emphasis added.] Ode 5 continues: “Not for an hour, not for a moment or even a portion thereof have I permitted thee, my benefactor and guardian, to rejoice, to be glad, or to exult in me, who am forever corrupting myself with sins.” Indeed the Orthodox Christian does not, and should not, take his/her guardian angel for granted. In Ode 6, we beseech our guardian angel to “cease not from guarding me and encircling me round about.” We continue beseeching in Ode 7 by pleading that our guardian angel “Cease not from mightily driving off with the fiery sword the myriads of invisible thieves attacking me round about...forget not thy servant, O my guide.” In Ode 8 Orthodox Christians credit our guardian angels with the need to “chastise” and “admonish” *us* to be saved. In the final stichera to the *Canon* we continue appealing to our guardian angels to “cease not to make entreaty...do not cease to ever shelter [our soul]...[and] cease not to care for me.” The foregoing quotations are from *A Prayer Book For Orthodox Christians*, translated from the Greek by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline, Mass., 1995), 303-319. One final note regarding a biblical verse is perhaps appropriate: “Jesus wept.” See John 11.35. If Jesus can weep out of love and sympathy, so, too, can the angels.

³¹ Danielou, Jean, S.J. *The Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church*. (Allen, Tx, 1953), 81.

not optional considerations. They go to the heart of our orthodox Christianity.³² It is within this context that this paper will be composed.

Defining “Angel”

The word “angel” originates from the Greek *angelos*, means “messenger of God.” God created angels. They are: real living beings; supernatural; non-physical; may assume corporeal appearances; and their spirituality is above human experience. The existence of angels is accepted on faith. Knowledge of their existence comes from God, i.e. revelation. Angels have reason and freedom for forming personal moral decisions. As a consequence, angels can sin. Pseudo-Dionysius is credited for the theological groundwork on angelology.

The Creator is very active in His creation. And guardian angels are an essential part of His creation and they have a role in our lives. Our guardian angel unites us with heaven, with God. We can, given our free will, ignore, misuse, abuse, and refuse our guardian angel. But we do so at our own peril. Man requires a greater understanding and appreciation of the significance of guardian angels. This, then, is a framework – a theological beginning – for a doctrine on guardian angels and the role they play in our daily lives.

The Earliest References

“The angel who delivers me from all evils, bless these boys, and my name shall be called upon them, and the name of my fathers, Abraam and Isaac; and let them be increased to a great multitude on the earth.”³³ St. Basil takes the angel in the foregoing verse from Genesis to refer to a guardian angel. Indeed not only Moses, but also Isaiah³⁴ and Jeremiah³⁵ make references to guardian angels. Of this Basil states that they (Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah) know “the angels [are] to be set over men as tutors and guardians [and] calls them to witness.”³⁶ Therefore, our initial theology of a guardian angel and the roles they play in our life stems from the Old Testament prophets.

Moses in referring to the angel who “delivers me from all evils” attributes to his guardian angel a saving, rescuing, or positive guiding influence. This coincides with Basil’s attribution of the angel being a “guardian” – a protector and overseer, and a “mentor” – a counselor, teacher, and instructor. This is not unlike the role that Socrates ascribes to his guardian angel in Plato’s (ca. 427-347) recount of Socrates’ suicide in the *Phaedo*. The very fact that Socrates and Plato believed in angels – a concept that could not be empirically proven (a key tenet of Platonic thought³⁷) – meant they were relying on faith. And faith in Platonic thought, unlike Christian thought, was not a virtue. I cite Socrates and Plato because I believe it is important to know that the concept of guardian angels existed outside the realm of Judaic belief. Indeed, the very concept of angels existed in Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Certainly the Holy Spirit’s influence affects non-Christians.

The New Testament

The Christian concept of faith is a way of life.³⁸ Faith is trusting and believing in the Triune God – and in those promises and creation He has given us. “[F]aith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen.”³⁹ The foundation of our faith – our trusting and believing in the existence of guardian angels – resides in the words of Jesus where in the Book of Matthew He advises “See that you do not despise one of these little ones;

³² The fact that one who believes in a Triune God must believe in angels *and* guardian angels is key tenet of both the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches. For a member of either church to *not believe* in angels or guardian angels is antithetical to the faith.

³³ Genesis 48:16, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton. (USA, 1998), 67. Hereafter, inasmuch as all Old Testament citations in this paper will emanate from the same text, referred to as *LXX*.

³⁴ Isa. 1:2, *LXX*. “Hear, O heaven and hearken, O earth: for the Lord has spoken, saying, I have begotten and reared up children, but they have rebelled against me.”

³⁵ Jer. 2:12, 13. *LXX*. “The heaven is amazed at this, and is very exceedingly horror-struck, saith the Lord. For my people has committed two faults, and evil ones: they have forsaken me, the fountain of water of life, and hewn out for themselves broken cisterns, which will not be able to hold water.”

³⁶ St. Basil, *On the Spirit, Chapter 13*.

³⁷ Platonists by definition, albeit simplified, are rationalists (seeking objects of the senses) and pursuers of eternal truths (seeking objects of the intellect, usually with a reliance on mathematical knowledge).

³⁸ Rom 1:17; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20; 3:11 RSV

³⁹ Heb 11:1, RSV

for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.”⁴⁰ “[T]heir angels” in this case means “their guardian angels.” And the guardian angels *always see the face of God* – not in His divine essence, but in His divine glory, His energies. What we are learning from this passage, the words of our Saviour, is that the primary role of the guardian angel is to minister for those who will inherit salvation.⁴¹ It is also important to note that this quotation of Jesus’ words has no limiters, but holds true for every person!⁴² “This is a truth, that each man has an Angel.”⁴³ Indeed, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Methodius, and Tertullian support the assessment that guardian angels are given to man at birth.⁴⁴

“They said to her, ‘You are mad.’ But she insisted that it was so. They said, ‘It is his angel!’”¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened, they saw him and were amazed.”⁴⁵ With this recounting by the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke, we receive an affirmation of Jesus’ words (as stated above in Matthew). In other words, the early church in living its faith – its trust and belief in Jesus – is evincing two things: its belief in angels and its belief that angels are assigned to people as guardian angels. There can be no other logical explanation for St. Luke’s words. Angels exist. Guardian angels exist. Even St. Peter had a guardian angel. So, too, do you – the reader – have a guardian angel.

The words of Luke depict a profound faith in God, the defining virtue of the Christian. We are told that faith in Christ is the one thing most pleasing to God; it is the “work of God” that we should believe in Christ.⁴⁶ Therefore, we please God by acknowledging His angels and guardian angels. We please God more so by honoring his angels and guardian angels. When we trust and believe in His creation, we are pleasing God. We must never forget that God offers us salvation by the very means that are pleasing to Him. And an essential element of His creation are the angels and guardian angels, both of which are here to assist us.

The Church Fathers

The following references to the Church Fathers will be minimal given the limited scope of this study. Nevertheless, the references are of significance and value. It will become evident that there is a thread present with the Church Fathers to be referenced in the following paragraphs. The thread begins with the Sicilian, Pantaeus, a Stoic philosopher who converted to Christianity and became the head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt. Of Pantaeus we know little and of his teachings we know less. An educated cosmopolitan, he was, nevertheless, instrumental in ensuring that the catechetical school was a success. And the metric of success is ascertainable by the students it produced. The first and most famous of Pantaeus’ students was Clement of Alexandria.

Clement of Alexandria is important to angelology for the following reasons. It is from him that we receive the affirmation that “to know God...is the first step in faith...through confidence in the teaching of the Saviour.” Clement continues “all men are His” meaning all men are God’s people. More importantly, he defines “all men” as “Greeks” and “Barbarians.” What Clement is doing is universalizing the faith, much as St. Luke did in his gospel. And it is because of God’s “dispensed...beneficence both to Greeks and Barbarians” that “the angels are distributed among the nations.”⁴⁷ It is important to read “among the nations” as meaning *beyond the nation of Israel*. God’s church is a universal church, for all people who adhere to the “teaching of the Saviour.” That is why “angels are distributed among the nations.” And it will become evident that that is why every person will have a guardian angel, whether Greek or Barbarian.

Clement transcends the breadth of angelic responsibility from nations to the individual man. “[The spiritual man]

⁴⁰ Matthew 18:10 RSV

⁴¹ Heb 1:14 RSV

⁴² And not just the baptized as some theologian scholars would hold.

⁴³ St. John Chrysostom. *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles. Homily XXVI. Acts XII. 1, 2.*

⁴⁴ Cited in Danielou, p. 71. Clement of Alexandria, *Ecl.*, 50; Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13, 49; Methodius, *Conv.*, 2, 6; Tertullian, *De an.*, 37, 1.

⁴⁵ Acts 12:15-16 RSV

⁴⁶ John 6:29 RSV. “Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

⁴⁷ Clement of Rome, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, The Stromata, Book VI, Chapter II.* (Peabody, Mass., 1995), 524.

prays in the society of angels...and he [man] is never out of their holy keeping.”⁴⁸ From this it is evident that angelic participation with man is intimate and personal. Therefore, though man may appear to be praying alone, he is not alone.

In reference to Matthew 18:10, “of the little ones, and of the least, which see God,” Clement makes explicit reference to “the oversight reaching to us exercised by the tutelary angels.” In this case “tutelary angels” means guardian angels. Here Clement is interpreting Matthew 18:10, the words of our Saviour, to affirm Christ’s revelation that we each have guardian angels.⁴⁹

In order to appreciate the significance of Clement of Alexandria, we must recognize that he was probably an Athenian who, as with Pantaenus, eventually became a teacher at the catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt. Clement became a defender of the faith against gnosticism albeit his liberal tendencies promoted a type of Christian gnosis. Despite this error, his contribution to angelology was very important inasmuch as his writings were probably reflective of the community of Christian believers. Origen was Clement’s greatest pupil.

Origen, perhaps the greatest of the early church fathers considering his theological contributions, too contributed an exegesis of Matthew 18:10.

All...things were disposed, as I have said, not indiscriminately and fortuitously, but by a most appropriate and just decision of God, who arranged them according to deserts, in accordance with His own approval and judgment: so that one angel the Church of the Ephesians was to be entrusted; to another, that of the Smyrnaeans; one angel was to be Peter’s, another Paul’s; and so on through every one of the little ones that are in the Church, for such and such angels as even daily behold the face of God must be assigned to each one of them; and there must also be some angel that encampeth round about them that fear God. All of which things, assuredly, it is to be believed, are not performed by accident or chance, or because they (the angels) were so created, lest on that view the Creator should be accused of partiality; but it is to be believed that they were conferred by God, thee just and impartial Ruler of all things, agreeably to the merits and good qualities and mental vigour of each individual spirit.⁵⁰

What Origen’s exegesis is telling us is that nothing, regarding the angels, has occurred by accident. God has no accidents. God, as stated in the introduction of this paper, is intimately involved in His creation and has planned everything as it exists. Therefore, as nation’s have angels assigned to them, so to do churches, and each individual person. What we are seeing to this point is the harmony of Clement and Origen regarding the words of our Saviour. But Origen goes beyond Clement and proffers three further statements: each individual is “attended” by a guardian angel; a warning that an unworthy individual could lose their guardian angel; and, we must listen to the “admonitions” of our guardian angel.

Each believer, although the humblest in the Church, is said to be attended by an angel, who is declared by the Saviour always to behold the face of God the Father, and as this angel was certainly one with the object of his guardianship; so, if the latter is rendered unworthy by his want of obedience, the angel of God is said to be taken from him, and then that part of him – the part, viz., which belongs to his human nature – being rent away from the divine part, is assigned a place along with unbelievers, because it has not faithfully observed the admonitions of the angel allotted it by God.⁵¹

While every person may have a guardian angel attending to his or her needs, we best not take the guardian angel for granted lest we lose it and be “assigned to a place with unbelievers.” This is the clearest and most succinct articulation, aside from the words of our Saviour, regarding universal individual guardian angels.

We cannot overstate the importance of Matthew 18:10. In Origen’s *Commentary on Matthew*, he states that “the angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him and delivereth them...and, so long as we are imperfect,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 545.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 466.

⁵⁰ Origen, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4, De Principiis, Book I, Chapter VIII*. (Peabody, Mass., 1995), 265.

⁵¹ Ibid., 296.

and need one to assist us that we may be delivered from evils, we stand in need of an angel of whom Jacob said, ‘The angel who delivered me from all evils.’”⁵² Our guardian angel is here to protect us and will do so providing we listen to it. Again Origen is warning us, so long as we are imperfect (and we always will be imperfect) we are in “need of one to assist us.” As I stated in the introduction, please do not take your guardian angel for granted! You cannot succeed alone.

It is for this reason that we must “[entrust] ourselves to the Supreme God through Jesus Christ, who has given us such instruction, and asking of Him all help, and the guardianship of holy and good angels, to defend us from the earth-spirits intent on lust, and blood, and sacrificial odours, and strange sounds and other sensual things!”⁵³

Origen has been called the “father of Christian theology” and for good reason, as I hope is partially evident above. A student of Clement of Alexandria, he succeeded Clement as the head of the catechetical school in Alexandria. The most prolific writer of the pre-Nicene period, his efforts reflect brilliant spiritual insights. In 250 when the emperor Decius was persecuting Christians, Origen was imprisoned and tortured for one year, only to be released in 251 upon Decius’ death. Origen withstood the tortures and never recanted his Christian beliefs. He would, however, die soon after his release; his death being caused by the tortures he endured. Origen’s doctrinal and apologetic efforts numbered over 2000 works.⁵⁴ Perhaps Origen’s most famous student was St. Gregory The Wonderworker.⁵⁵

St. Gregory, too, acknowledged the existence and role of guardian angels – particularly his guardian angel that led him to Origen.

“But let this word of ours be taken primarily as an eucharistic address in honour of this sacred personage, who stands alone among all men; and if I may seek to discourse of aught beyond this, and, in particular, of any of those beings who are not seen, but yet are more godlike, and who have a special care for men, it shall be addressed to that being who, by some momentous decision, had me allotted to him from my boyhood to rule, and rear, and train,—I mean that holy angel of God who fed me from my youth, as says the saint dear to God, meaning thereby his own peculiar one.

...

But we, in addition to the homage we offer to the Common Ruler of all men, acknowledge and praise that being, whosoever he is, who has been the wonderful guide of our childhood, who in all other matters has been in time past my beneficent tutor and guardian. For this office of tutor and guardian is one which evidently can suit neither me nor any of my friends and kindred; for we are all blind, and see nothing of what is before us, so as to be able to judge of what is right and fitting; but it can suit only him who sees beforehand all that is for the good of our soul: *that angels, I say*, who still at this present time sustains, and instructs, and conducts me; and who, in addition to all these other benefits, has brought me into connection with this man [Origen], which in truth is the most important of all the services done me.⁵⁶

St. Gregory is paying great homage to his guardian angel, who has had to “rule, and rear, and train” him and “fed” (no doubt, allegorically) from his youth. Gregory attributes his guardian angel with the roles of being his “beneficent tutor and guardian.” As highly as Gregory holds Origen, it is probably worth saying that his emotions, while perhaps influencing the inflexion of his language, are not influencing the essence of his beliefs. On the contrary, Gregory is manifesting his spiritual beliefs in his words. There should be no doubt that he believes he is indebted to his guardian angel.

It is worth noting that Gregory was not raised in a Christian family. His family was financially fairly well to do and this afforded him a legal education in Athens and Berytus, the latter being the “mother and nurse” of Roman civil law. It was during his time at Berytus that Gregory was moved, by his guardian angel, to travel to Palestinian Caesarea where he would meet Origen. As a student of Origen “he received lessons in logic, geometry, physics, ethics,

⁵² Ibid., *Volume 9, Commentary on Matthew*, 490.

⁵³ Ibid., *Against Celsus, Book VIII*, 662.

⁵⁴ Only St. Augustine would be a more prolific writer.

⁵⁵ Gregory Thaumaturgus (Wonder-Worker), ca. 213 – ca. 260.

⁵⁶ St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *The Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen, Argument IV*, 24-25.

philosophy, and ancient literature, and in due time also in biblical science and the verities of the Christian faith.”⁵⁷ Gregory would eventually go on to become the bishop of his hometown, Neo-Caesarea.

I believe it is important to note, that Gregory was for a lengthy period of time a student in the mode of learning and acquiring knowledge. While we do not know the exact length of time he was a student, he did study at least from 219 (if not before) through 238, when, after spending five years with Origen, they went their separate ways. He was willing, if not wanting, to learn. And this quality no doubt empowered his guardian angel to rule, rear, train, and feed him. Gregory went on to become a faithful servant of God, no doubt guided by his guardian angel.⁵⁸

The Powers of Guardian Angels

There are multiple other citations available regarding the existence of guardian angels. But for the sake of brevity it is important to move on and address the powers of the guardian angels. In doing so, we will look at the powers of angels – the larger set – of which guardian angels are a subset. There is no attribute that guardian angels can possess that is not within the realm of the angels.

It is not an oversimplification to say that guardian angels have limited powers. Nor would it be an overstatement to say that guardian angels are empowered by the person whom they are attending to or looking after. Let me address the former before addressing the latter.

Guardian angels cannot forgive sins.

“I have written this, not in order to confound you, but that the examples of these kings may stir you up to put away this sin from your kingdom, for you will do it away by humbling your soul before God. You are a man, and it has come upon you, conquer it. Sin is not done away but by tears and penitence. Neither angel can do it, nor archangel. The Lord Himself, Who alone can say, "I am with you," if we have sinned, does not forgive any but those who repent.”⁵⁹

Only God can forgive sins. Ambrose goes on to say:

“That the Spirit forgives sin is common to Him with the Father and the Son, but not with the Angels. Tell me, then, whoever you are who deny the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit could not be liable to sin, Who rather forgives sin. Does an Angel forgive? Does an Archangel? Certainly not, but the Father alone, the Son alone, and the Holy Spirit alone. Now no one is unable to avoid that which he has power to forgive.”⁶⁰

Let there be no doubt, no equivocation whatsoever, that the angels and our guardian angels are powerless when it comes to forgiving sins. They can listen to us (all the while knowing the truth since they have been with us the entire time). They can hear our side of the story and tales of woe, but their listening will not obviate the need for the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁸ If for no other reason than anecdotal interest, Gregory is worthy of his last name – wonder-worker. The following material is quoted from the footnote on page 6 of *Volume 6* (ibid.). “He could move the largest stones by a word; he could heal the sick; the demons were subject to him, and were exorcised by his fiat; he could give bounds to overflowing rivers; he could dry up mighty lakes; he could cast his cloak over a man, and cause his death; once, spending a night in a heathen temple, he banished its divinities by his simple presence, and by merely placing on the altar a piece of paper bearing the words, *Gregory to Satan – enter*, he could bring the presiding demons back to their shrine. One strange story told of him by Gregory of Nyssa is to the effect that, as Gregory was meditating on the great matter of the right way to worship the true God, suddenly two glorious personages made themselves manifest in his room, in the one of whom he recognized the Apostle John, in the other the Virgin. They had come, as the story goes, to solve the difficulties which were making him hesitate in accepting the bishopric. At Mary’s request, the evangelist gave him then all the instruction in doctrine which he was seeking for; and the sum of these supernatural communications being written down by him after the vision vanished, formed the creed which is still preserved among his writings. Such were the wonders believed to signalize the life of Gregory.”

⁵⁹ St. Ambrose, *Selected Letters. Letter LI.*

⁶⁰ St. Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit to the Emperor Gratian, Book I, Chapter X.*

sacrament of confession.

Angels have free will.

“It is to be observed further, that freedom of will is used in several senses, one in connection with God, another in connection with angels, and a third in connection with men. For used in reference to God it is to be understood in a superessential manner, and in reference to angels it is to be taken in the sense that the election is concomitant with the state, and admits of the interposition of no interval of time at all: for while the angel possesses free-will by nature, he uses it without let or hindrance, having neither antipathy on the part of the body to overcome nor any assailant.”⁶¹

Given the nature of angels, the decision to exercise their free will for God or with the Prince of Futility is made at the time of their creation. We believe that angels, as personal beings, have reason and, as a consequence, the freedom to forming personal moral decisions – throughout our lives. Therefore, it is conceivable that angels could sin. If tradition is correct, the evil angels along with the Prince of Futility, in having chosen to not serve God, are in sin. And this exists despite the fact that the angels as they were created were absolutely pure, possessed of a natural happiness, sanctified by the Holy Spirit from their creation, and lived in blessed holy communion with God. Nevertheless, some angels serve God. And others do not. Of those who serve God, i.e., our guardian angels, He works in creation through them.⁶²

Angels cannot be in two places simultaneously.

“The angel, although not contained in place with figured form as is body, yet is spoken of as being in place because he has a mental presence and energises in accordance with his nature, and is not elsewhere but has his mental limitations there where he energises. For it is impossible to energise at the same time in different places. For to God alone belongs the power of energising everywhere at the same time. The angel energises in different places by the quickness of his nature and the promptness and speed by which he can change his place: but the Deity, Who is everywhere and above all, energises at the same time in diverse ways with one simple energy.”⁶³

While not omnipresent like God, they can move very, very fast from one place to another. Our human conceptions of speed are wholly irrelevant to the speed at which angels can move. Thus in but a mere moment our guardian angels can be beside us, then move to being before God, and return back to our side without us knowing (as if we could know) that it ever left our side.

Although our guardian angels cannot forgive our sins, it ought to be obvious that as *messengers of God* they can communicate with God on our behalf and communicate with us on God’s behalf. In this role, it is possible that they can comfort us – providing we are listening to them. St. Luke presents a sterling example of this possibility when he states “Then an angel appeared to Him [Jesus Christ] from heaven, strengthening Him.” Within the gospels, only St. Luke reports this event. It is a reflection of the human agony of Jesus and the divine help given to Him as He contemplates his Crucifixion. Certainly if “Christ in his [human] agony [has] an angel to strengthen Him”⁶⁴ then we, too, can have the same consideration – assuming we are listening and open to God’s creation. Of this Hippolytus of Rome states, “And in an agony He sweats blood, and is strengthened by an angel, who Himself strengthens those who believe in Him.”⁶⁵ If we believe in Him, He will strengthen us through His angels.

Similarly, St. John Chrysostom teaches us that angels have a role in guiding and protecting us. In his guidance to the catechumens he refers to the role of a guardian angel as an angel of peace.

⁶¹ St. Basil, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith. Book III. Chapter XIV.*

⁶² Notes from class on July 19, 2001.

⁶³ St. Basil, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book I, Chapter XIII.*

⁶⁴ St. Jerome. *Against the Pelagians. Book II. Chapter 16.*

⁶⁵ Hippolytus of Rome. *Extant Works and Fragments. Expository Treatise Against The Jews.*

“For part we say ourselves, and part we permit them to say, now opening unto them the door of prayer, (exactly as we first teach children [what to say], and then bid them say it of themselves,) saying, "Pray ye, Catechumens, for the angel of peace;" for there is an angel that punisheth, as when He saith, "A band of evil angels," (Ps. lxxviii. 49) there is that destroyeth. Wherefore we bid them ask for the angel of peace, teaching them to seek that which is the bond of all good things, peace; so that they may be delivered from all fightings, all wars, all seditions.”⁶⁶

The “angel of peace” is not only referred to for catechumens but is also carried forth into the Orthodox liturgy to this day.

What we have learned from the above is that angels, and by extension guardian angels, have limited powers.

- They cannot forgive our sins.
- They have free will. And this is important because we should recognize that they – our guardian angels – are with us because they *want* to be with us.
- They cannot be in two places simultaneously, but they can move faster than we can imagine. And this is important, because it means for all practical human purposes that they never leave our side.
- They *are* messengers of God. There should be no doubt about this.
- They can comfort us in our time of need.
- They can guide and protect us from evil.
- And, we learned in the sections preceding this, that guardian angels can be our tutors to rule, rear, train, and feed us spiritually.

The foregoing list is certainly not all-inclusive vis-à-vis the angelic powers. To believe an all-inclusive list could be humanly discerned would be vain. But the list is important in enabling us to determine what the role of our guardian angels is in our daily lives. Knowing what our guardian angels can and cannot do, this moves us to the second issue posited at the beginning of this section on page 12: “Nor would it be an overstatement to say that guardian angels are empowered by the person whom they are attending to or looking after.”

We empower our guardian angels to act. We, you and I, empower our guardian angels to assume the roles listed above. However, proof of this premise is impossible. Acceptance of this premise is an act of faith. But I would once again cite Hippolytus of Rome, “And in an agony He sweats blood, and is strengthened by an angel, who Himself strengthens those who believe in Him.”⁶⁷ The key phrase to consider is: “strengthened by an angel, who Himself strengthens those who believe in him.” In other words, we must exercise our faith! We must let God know of our love for Him. We must live our faith in our daily lives. By doing so, we will open ourselves to God and His will, and empower Him to act upon us in a way that is pleasing to Him. And one of these ways is through our guardian angel! We will have empowered our guardian angel to act with and upon us and serve God in our life.

Lex Orandi, Lex Crendi

The Law of prayer is the law of belief. This axiom is embedded in the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Church. The axiom of tradition can be traced back to St. Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390-ca. 463). It affirms the “liturgy as the norm of the faith, that is, how the Church prays witnesses to what the Church believes.”⁶⁸ Demonstration of this “norm of the faith” is evident in every Orthodox Divine Liturgy.

In the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom the following petition is included in the Second Litany of Supplication immediately following the Anaphora and preceding the Lord’s Prayer. “For an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us beseech the Lord.”⁶⁹ If we are going to make *lex orandi, lex credendi*

⁶⁶ St. John Chrysostom. *Homilies on Second Corinthians. Homily II: 2 Cor i.10, 11.*

⁶⁷ Op.cit., Hippolytus of Rome.

⁶⁸ Bretzke, James T., S.J. *Consecrated Phrases: A Latin Theological Dictionary.* (Collegeville, Minn., 1998), 65.

⁶⁹ The exact wording may have minor variation between the different Orthodox jurisdictions. This version of the wording is taken from American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese – the diocese to which this writer belongs - pew book.

meaningful, come to life and be a part of our living faith, then we – Orthodox Christians – need to take the above petition regarding our guardian angel to heart.

Conclusion

This study is but a brief one. There is so much more that could be stated regarding guardian angels. And no matter how much more we would write it never fully capture the entire realm of possibilities and roles of the guardian angel in our life. This we, as humans, can never begin to know – nor is it necessary for us to know – the magnitude of the role of guardian angles in our lives. What is important is that there are guardian angels. Matthew 18:10, the words of our Saviour, states unequivocally that guardian angels exist. What is also important – and this we must appreciate – is that we can empower our guardian angels to serve the God intended role in our lives. It is up to us to act. We must open up to God's will, love Him, and serve Him. In doing so, we will come to a greater awareness of the heavenly realm.

Going back to the beginning paragraphs of this paper, guardian angels are serious business. It is not a subject we should trivialize or take for granted. Why? Because God is serious business.

Canon To The Guardian Angel Troparion

*O Angel of God, my holy guardian, keep my life in the fear of Christ God;
Strengthen my mind in the true way,
And wound my soul with heavenly love, so that, guarded by thee,
I may obtain of Christ God great mercy.*

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