

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

LUTHER, ANGELS, AND GOD

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE RELIGION DEPARTMENT
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
B.A. OF RELIGION

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

BY

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SAINT PETER, MINNESOTA

SPRING, 2009

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Acknowledgments

I am sincerely grateful to my advisor, editor, and role model, Dr. Darrell Jodock, the Drell and Adeline Bernhardson Distinguished Professor of Lutheran Studies at Gustavus Adolphus College. I thank him for inspiring me to take on this project, his guidance and harassment throughout, and his challenging me to attempt to see what lies on the “fringes of the blanket.”

Most of all, I thank my best friend and beautiful bride for her ceaseless support and love throughout this process. It is now my turn to make her dinner, take care of the real life issues, and clean our apartment.

Introduction

For many people, the world begins with what one can see or touch. Willing to acknowledge only the experiences of mental life, their world seems relatively straight forward. Others are captivated by mystery, invariably intrigued with the unknown. These people may be fluent in the language of miracles, spirits, dreams, demonology, and angelology. There are varying interpretations originating from all walks of life which address the concept, role, and legitimacy of angels.

References to angels appear everywhere. They are represented in contemporary Christian art, television programs, emblems, and souvenirs. Christian book stores showcase journals, picture frames, jewelry, decorative pins, compact discs, posters, Angel Tree figurines, and even Angel Wars trading cards. According to Harold Bloom,¹ sixty nine percent of Americans believe in angels, while twenty-five percent do not.² Forty six percent perceive themselves to have their own guardian angels, while twenty one percent deny their presence.³ When addressing the nature of angels, fifty five percent claim them to be higher beings used as God's agents, fifteen percent perceive them to be spirits of the dead, eighteen percent deem them as simply religious symbols, and seven percent claim them to be nonsense.⁴ Contemporary pop culture is crazed about angels.

When one turns to the Bible, angels are mentioned as God's emissaries in 34 of the Bible's 66 books, including all four Gospels and seven letters of Saint Paul. The book of

¹ Harold Bloom is a Jewish professor at Yale University, who writes of polls that reveal the American understanding of angels.

² Harold Bloom, *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 42.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Revelation associates angels with the end times, mentioning them in all but one of that book's 21 chapters.⁵ Angels appear in significant moments in scripture, for example at Jesus' birth and resurrection. In biblical Hebrew, the main meaning of the term angel (mal'ak) is "my messenger/envoy."⁶ However, not all messengers were angels. For instance, the name of the prophetic book that closes the Old Testament, Malachi, means "messenger," but its content makes it clear that Malachi was a human messenger — a prophet, not an angel.⁷

The subject of angels invokes many different ideas depending on the source. Some say they appear in dreams, meditations, the arts, good people of the world, or in "near-death experiences." Many will say an interest in angels is only a knee-jerk reaction to the violent, complicated times we live in — that it is only human nature to hope for a gentler life, to seek refuge in the comfort of angels.⁸ In a post-Enlightenment world, one may argue that the world has lost its enchantment in what cannot be harnessed into concrete knowledge, arguing it must be false. Others may argue the awesomeness, grandeur of the angels as direct connections to the Almighty God, reassuring of God's presence in the world. Angels do not have a single definition and purpose.

Throughout history there have been many interpretations of angels. Saint Thomas Aquinas proclaimed angels were completely spiritual bodies, but Saint Augustine did not know if

⁵ Evangelical Church in America, "Angels," <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Angels.aspx> (accessed November 7, 2008). (The excluded chapter being Chapter 13).

⁶ www.elca.org.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rex Hauck, *Angels: The Mysterious Messengers* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), xiii.

they had spiritual bodies or not.⁹ Thanks to Aquinas, the Roman Catholic doctrine of angels is orderly and rational,¹⁰ and insists on the otherness of angels when deemed closer to God than humans.¹¹ Poet John Milton held that all actual beings must be embodied, thus angels actually eat, make love to each other, and can be wounded.¹² Jakob Boehme,¹³ believed angels to be God's thoughts, shaped like humans.¹⁴ They were God's only instruments in the world. Emanuel Swedenborg¹⁵ taught of angels being resurrected human beings following their death.¹⁶ C.S. Lewis adhered to a model of the nine realms of angels.¹⁷ Even the most brilliant minds have had varying and even opposing viewpoints on the concept of angels.

In a recent conversation, author Shane Claiborne – a significant voice in the contemporary Christian world¹⁸ – commented on his understanding of angels.¹⁹ After first

⁹ Bloom, *The Gnosis of Angels*, 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 56.

¹¹ Ibid., 74.

¹² Ibid., 38.

¹³ Jakob Boehme was a German Protestant of the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

¹⁴ Bloom, *The Gnosis of Angels*, 39.

¹⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg was a Swedish scientist, philosopher, Christian mystic, and theologian in the 17th century.

¹⁶ Bloom, *The Gnosis of Angels*, 39.

¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸ Jim Wallis, author of *God's Politics*, and editor of *Sojourners*, refers to Claiborne as “one of the best representatives of an emerging Christianity that could change the face of American religion and politics.” Jim Wallis “Foreword”, *Irresistible Revolution* by Shane Claiborne (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2006), 15.

¹⁹ Shane Claiborne, interview by Benjamin C. Hilding, Saint Peter, MN, April 22, 2009.

admitting he had never met one, he said he has always loved the verse in Hebrews that reads, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”²⁰ Claiborne added that there are a lot of things happening outside of our immediate vision. “Jesus had a lot to say about having the eyes to see and ears to hear.” Claiborne referenced a man he knew who could see angels, and that there is a possibility for us to do so as well, if we pray that God would continue to give us eyes to do so. Claiborne concluded that as long as we have our faith and trust in God, nothing else essentially matters. “It is easy to get obsessed with signs and wonders – it is a thing Jesus resisted – trying to woo people by the splendor of things rather than the simple beauty of love, the beauty of God.” Claiborne will be featured as a keynote speaker at the 2009 ELCA national youth gathering.

Even though Claiborne may be the voice of the youth gathering today, to analyze the Lutheran tradition, I turn directly to sixteenth century Protestant reformer Martin Luther. Justo L. Gonzalez²¹ refers to Luther as “without a doubt the most significant Christian theologian of the sixteenth century.”²² Compared to key concepts such as “justification by faith” or the “theology of the cross,” it is difficult to find a concise interpretation of Luther’s angelology. The popular view and the scholarly explanation of angels seem to be dissonant in Lutheran theology. At Luther Seminary’s book store in Saint Paul, MN, the most informative book on angels is not

²⁰ NIV, Hebrews 13:2. [Dr. Darrell Jodock comments that this verse refers back to Genesis, when Abraham’s hospitality to strangers was in fact a gesture to angels. (Dr. Darrell Jodock, personal conversations with author, Gustavus Adolphus College, spring semester, 2009).]

²¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, Methodist, is a significant Cuban-American historian of Christian theology who taught for a time at Emory University.

²² Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, Vol. III. (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), 25.

written by Martin Luther, but by Billy Graham.²³ Rarely is this topic addressed in Lutheran churches today outside of the references found in liturgy. Hence the question, “What was Luther’s understanding of angels?”

Luther certainly did refer to angels numerous times in his work. In the current electronic Weimar edition of Luther’s works, a search of the author’s texts reveals 4,691 uses of the word *Engel* (angel), 849 uses of *Engeln* (angels), and 1,431 occurrences of the Latin *angelus*, in addition to a host of individual references to the seraphim and cherubim, and to archangels such as Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.²⁴ In many passages in which Luther refers to angels, he is discussing other issues completely unconnected to angelology. But when his works are examined closely, we find Luther devoted significant attention to the subject of angels at key points in his career, showing angels were important to Luther throughout his life.²⁵

An analysis of these key references of angels proves that Martin Luther believed angels to be real, valid, and active beings in the world. What matters most to Luther is the God-human relationship, and therefore angels can only be properly understood within this context. Following Luther, a response from Lutheran Orthodoxy either synchronized with Luther’s teachings, filled in the missing pieces of what Luther taught, or made claims about angels that went beyond Luther’s intent. Nonetheless, the recurring common themes in Luther’s works are primarily reiterated in Lutheran Orthodoxy. By looking to Luther and the teachings of classical Orthodox theologians, one can find that angels are real, valid, and provide insight into how God relates to humans, and how humans relate to God.

²³ Billy Graham, *Angels* (Dallas: Word Pub, 1994).

²⁴ Philip M. Soergel, “Luther on the Angels,” in *Angels in the Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

²⁵ Ibid.

I. Luther's writings

Martin Luther discussed the topic of angels at a variety of times and contexts in his career. These include scattered yet revealing references to angels in his popular writings, his commentaries on Psalms, his *Sermon on Preparation for Death*, the *Lectures on Zechariah*, his reflections on Galatians and the Gospel of St. John, his *Sermon on the Angels*, and his massive lecture series on Genesis.

Martin Luther's popular writings include the *Small* and *Large Catechism*, the *Smalcald Articles*, as well as his written hymns. Luther's most widely known writing, the *Small Catechism*, has formed the basis for instruction in preparation for confirmation in the Lutheran church.²⁶ In this handbook, Luther was attempting to offer a pattern of spirituality for the Christian who lives in the world rather than in the monastery.²⁷ The notable references to angels in this work are found in Luther's Morning and Evening prayers. Both of these prayers contain the common petition, "Let thy holy angel have charge of me, that the wicked one may have no power over me,"²⁸ indicating a protective role of angels. In the *Large Catechism*, only one reference to angels can be found,²⁹ in which Luther talks about God rejoicing with the angels following Christian obedience. He also briefly mentions angels in the *Smalcald Articles* when

²⁶ Timothy F. Lull, ed. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 410.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Luther, *Small Catechism*.

²⁹ David M. Wagner, *The Angelology of Dr. Martin Luther* (Unpublished Thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1982), 6.

commenting on the invocation of saints.³⁰ Both the *Large Catechism* and the *Smalcald Articles* are dead ends to understanding Luther's angelology; similar frustrations are frequently encountered elsewhere in Luther's writings.

In comparison to his catechisms and *Smalcald Articles*, Luther mentions angels much more significantly in his written hymns.³¹ The picture of the angels that Luther presents in his hymns is one in which the angels are God's messengers. Another activity that is carried out by the angels in Luther's hymns is praise to God, especially the Son of God incarnate.³² Some of the hymns concerning angels are "Te Deum Laudamus,"³³ "The Christmas Hymn- All Praise to Thee, Eternal God,"³⁴ "To Shepherds as They Watched by Night,"³⁵ and "Now Praise We Christ,

³⁰ Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 307.

³¹ The reason for this is up to one's own interpretation. A 1984 edition of *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, offers one suggestion on how the language of angels is more adequately represented in liturgy than it is in formalized logic: "liturgy is *art* that angels and archangels and streams and stars are spirited in it. Sung, 'with angels and archangels,' seems perfectly natural. Even in a said service, if the language of the great thanksgiving has poetic dignity, all is well. But when liturgical experimenters have tried to make the prayers relevant by reducing them to prose, the presiding minister feels foolish at such passages." This passage also identifies angels with the Spirit, and adds, "Insofar as the universal role of the Spirit is describable in books, these should be books of faithful speculation, making no strong claim to be the teaching of the churches. The dogmatic substance of what must here be said belongs not so much in books as in liturgies." In this understanding, liturgy is understood to be a way in which humans can encounter the Spirit that is more fitting of the Spirit's nature than, per se, writings. This is but one of many possible explanations. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, editors, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 174.

³² *Ibid.*, 13.

³³ Martin Luther, "Liturgy and Hymns" ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, Vol. 53 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 172.

³⁴ W.G. Polack, *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*. 3rd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1975), 65-66.

³⁵ Bernhard Pick, *Luther as a Hymnist* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Book Store, 1875), 39.

the Holy One.”³⁶ Luther’s hymn that expresses the greatest details of angels is his Sanctus hymn, “Isaiah, Mighty Seer, in Days of Old.”³⁷ Luther also revised a medieval litany titled, “God the Father, Be Our Stay,” because, as W. Polack writes, Luther objected inappropriate invocations to the angels instead of Christ.³⁸ Luther’s hymnology is an interesting source of understanding Luther’s angelology in context.

Early in his career as a professor at the University of Wittenberg, Luther taught a course of lectures on the Psalms. Richard Marius³⁹ remarks that these lectures hint at Luther’s grand themes not yet fully developed.⁴⁰ Missouri Synod Lutheran scholars, Hilton C. Oswald and George S. Robert, stress the need to keep Luther’s statements in context for danger of a one-sided view of what Luther is saying.⁴¹ In these years of 1513-1515, Luther wrestled with the problem of the righteousness of God, and the relation to the sinner.⁴² Although the exact time when he has a breakthrough in his understanding of God’s righteousness is debated, Luther’s comments on angels in the *Lectures on the Psalms* indicate his thought prior to his tower

³⁶ Ibid., 41.

³⁷ Wagner, 12.

³⁸ Polack, 182.

³⁹ Richard Marius, a former Harvard professor, writes from a nonreligious perspective. He writes with neither malice nor partisanship toward any religious confession.

⁴⁰ Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 94.

⁴¹ Hilton C. Oswald and George S. Robert *Luther as Interpreter of Scripture: A Source Collection of Illustrative Samples from the Expository Works of the Reformer in Luther’s Works: American Edition*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 10.

⁴² Ibid.

experience.⁴³ In the *Lectures on the Psalms*, Luther talks much about the living truth of Christ and his continuing presence as Savior and Redeemer. This kind of truth can only be explained to someone with a common experience. This understanding brought Luther to a point of early affection for German mysticism, where he resolves to work for truth not through persuasion, but through a process of recognition once one already has this truth in possession.⁴⁴ Another theme in these *Lectures on the Psalms* is Luther's continual practice of setting up dualisms and paradoxes. "Gerhard Ebeling has remarked that Luther continually posed opposites – the spirit and the letter, the visible and the invisible, the hidden and the manifest, and the celestial and the earthly. In particular he set in opposition the visible and invisible, the revealed and the hidden."⁴⁵ The language of dualism is critical for the discussion of the relationship between the good and the fallen angels, and how God works through invisible means, for visible results.

These *lectures on the Psalms* provide a glimpse into Luther's understanding of angels at an early point in his career.

The Psalms' texts did lead him on several important occasions to discuss these spirits' character, and these passages reveal his essentially traditional angelology. His discussions of the Psalms' phraseology, for instance, are heavily laden with allegory. Terms like 'the shadow of thy wings' are dissected to reveal the hidden attributes, not only of Christ, but of the angels. The 'shadow of thy wings' evokes

⁴³ At this point, Luther's understanding of angels is parallel to his understanding of Christ. Luther sees Christ's teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount, as impossible to attain, elevated above an achievable human standard. Therefore, Luther was frustrated with the gospel. After Luther had what is called his "tower experience," Luther understood the righteousness of God more to mean the righteousness from God. Righteousness is something God gives away, which precedes the human's ability to be righteous. Therefore, in his *Lectures on the Psalms*, Luther also understood angels as somehow above, and consequently separated from a meaningful relationship with human beings.

⁴⁴ Marius, 98.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 90.

the protection and watch of the holy angels, who are the wings of God, for in them He soars and dwells in affectionate and encaptured minds.⁴⁶

Luther referenced Psalms 24, 91, and 125 as sources for assurance to the faithful, as God directs his living world of angels to protect those facing trials.⁴⁷ Luther's angelology appears consonant with the traditions of the late medieval world, which concerned the various ranks, types, and roles of angels.⁴⁸ Even though Luther's concept of the righteousness of God was not fully developed, these understandings of angels are not contradictory to what they would later become. While Luther was just beginning his career as an established theologian, he was already providing significant material to an understanding of his angelology.

On November 1, 1519, Luther acceded to a request from a persistent man named Mark Schart to write a sermon about dealing with the fear of death.⁴⁹ In this sermon, "A Sermon on Preparation for Death," Luther clearly spoke as a pastor who wanted to help the dying spiritually prepare themselves by placing their trust entirely in God.⁵⁰ The subject of death prompted some of Luther's most decided praise of angels. In this sermon, Luther highlights the angel's guardianship role in preserving the faith of the dying.⁵¹ The concept of guardian angel, especially during the times of suffering, is a subject in which Luther offered interesting insight.

⁴⁶ Soergel, 69.

⁴⁷ Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics: A Re-examination of Luther's Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 212.

⁴⁸ Soergel, 68.

⁴⁹ Lull, 580.

⁵⁰ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 110.

⁵¹ Soergel, 71.

In the middle of his career, Luther lectured on the minor prophets in his *Lectures on Zechariah*.

Luther's lectures on the minor prophets were given in the years 1524-26, years of crisis both for Luther personally and for the Reformation movement in general. Resistance to the radical style of reformation demanded by Carlstadt and Muntzer, the Peasants' Revolt, Luther's marriage, the declaration against Erasmus in *The Bondage of the Will*, the death of Luther's prince and protector, the Elector Frederick, and even a rumor about an attempt to assassinate the Reformer -- these were events that filled the year 1525 with anxiety and decisions. Toward the end of that year Luther began his lectures on Zechariah.⁵²

These *Lectures on Zechariah* show an increased frequency of references to angels, and their activity in the world.⁵³ These texts are interesting because Luther shows complete freedom from traditional styles of biblical interpretation. Luther remarked that these writings are those of encouragement and comfort, in which "one learns how God rules the world by means of the angels."⁵⁴ This has proved to be a significant source of understanding Luther's angelology, as well as an insightful reference to how God's use of the angels as governors is only one of four means⁵⁵ by which God rules the world.

Luther also gave attention to the topic of angels in his *Lectures on Galatians*. "Throughout the lectures on Galatians, Luther seems to have heightened the mystery of faith and its superiority over reason. The existence of mystery is testimony to the difficulty of faith."⁵⁶ Luther taught about St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians on numerous occasions, because he

⁵² Oswald and Robert, 63.

⁵³ Soergel, 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁵ See footnote #137.

⁵⁶ Marius, 111.

considered continuous attention to the present danger of the devil to be especially significant.

Luther said to his class at the University of Wittenberg on July 3, 1531, “this doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough.”⁵⁷ The topic of angels entered in Luther’s lectures on the power of evil, and the spiritual forces alive in the world.

The next stage of Luther’s career included significant references to angels, initially found in his commentaries on the Gospel of Saint John, a specific sermon on angels, and his extensive reflections on Genesis. “By the early 1530s, Luther continued to consider the mission of the angels on many occasions; yet, with increasing discrimination, he strove to define their place within an evangelical Christianity.”⁵⁸ In these final years, Luther was battling the ‘false’ accounts of angels compared to the reality of angels.

After 1530, he came increasingly to war against the ‘fables’, ‘sophistries’, and ‘false’ accounts of apparitions that had grown up around these figures in previous centuries. At the same time he was quick to point to the ongoing and ever-present reality of the angels’ ministrations, seeing in them an antidote to the enormous but nonetheless subordinate powers of the devil and his minions. While he seems to have grown increasingly skeptical of reports of contemporary angelic apparitions, all the same he did not deny their possibility. More often, he came to insist that the angels’ work occurred in secret. In these final years, then, a more critical attitude toward the angels emerged in his work, often couched in terms of polemical attacks on medieval angelology.⁵⁹

As Luther aged, he became increasingly concerned about placing too much importance on angels. This is due to an incorrect understanding of a God-angel relationship. By battling the false accounts in his later years, Luther established an appropriate understanding of angels in relation to God, and in relation to human beings.

⁵⁷ Oswald and Robert, 83.

⁵⁸ Soergel, 73.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

“In a table conversation of the year 1540 Martin Luther referred to his book on John 14-16 as ‘the best book I have ever written.’”⁶⁰ In these Lectures on Saint John, Luther focused on Christ’s promise to turn the depth of sorrow into unspeakable joy.⁶¹ “With respect to Jesus’ words about being the way, the truth and the life, Luther found occasion to speak of ‘life beyond,’ among other things.”⁶² Luther also said that, “I have resolved to interpret these chapters for the common man, but especially to defend and preserve the true and pure doctrine of Christ and of the Christian faith against the vile mobs of the devil, whether present or future.”⁶³ An assessment of this favorite work of Luther’s uncovers noteworthy references to angels.

On St. Michael’s Day on September 29, 1530 at the castle of Coburg, Luther preached a sermon on the topic of the angels. He was in contact with Melancton, who was attempting to reconcile Protestants and Catholics at the Diet of Augsburg.⁶⁴ Philip Soergel writes that Luther’s aim with this sermon, “was to set out his own powerful vision of angelology against the ‘fables’ and ‘errors’ of the later Middle Ages. The feast of Michaelmas had long been the Church’s most important holiday for celebrating the deeds of St. Michael the Archangel and the full complement of heaven’s angels.”⁶⁵ This sermon will be added to the American edition of

⁶⁰ Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 210.

⁶¹ Oswald and Robert, 113 (from the Introduction to Luther’s Vol. 24).

⁶² Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 211.

⁶³ Oswald and Robert, 113.

⁶⁴ Soergel, 74.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Luther's Works in late 2009,⁶⁶ but for the sake of this paper, Bengt Hoffman's 1985 translation of the sermon is used.⁶⁷ Hoffman writes that "it is assumed that one of Luther's friends took notes, and then wrote out the sermon on the basis of Luther's draft."⁶⁸ Soergel comments that in this sermon, "Luther devotes more than four-fifths of the space in his remarks to recounting the exploits of the devil and his fallen angels."⁶⁹ This source not only provides significant insight into Luther's understanding of angels and their relation to the devil, but more so the humans relationship to God through the means of angels.

References of angels in his commentaries of Genesis are especially worth noting. Since these writings were completed in the latter parts of his career, they reflect Luther's most mature and encompassing understanding. Also, angels figure more prominently in these commentaries than they had in any of the other pronouncements to this point in his career as a theologian.⁷⁰ Therefore, a detailed analysis of Luther's reflections on Genesis indicates many direct explanations of his angelology, as well as a plethora of pieces to a bigger and more thorough

⁶⁶ Hoffman writes that the reason this sermon has not been included in the English collection of *Luther's Works*, "may indicate that the theological mind-set governing the selection may consider belief in angels as a part of primitive or medieval lore, best left untouched since 'modernity' finds it hard to accept 'supernaturalism.'" Bengt Hoffman, *On the Angels: a sermon by Martin Luther of 1530* (Gettysburg, PA.: GAM, 1985), i.

⁶⁷ In the latter months of 2009, twenty additional volumes of *Luther's Works* will be published. The seventh division will consist of Luther's sermons from the years 1521-1546, including this sermon. (For more information, see *Luther's Works*. "Prospectus" <http://cyberbrethren.typepad.com/cyberbrethren/files/lwprospectus.pdf>, 1.)

⁶⁸ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, i.

⁶⁹ Soergel, 76.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

puzzle. The Genesis text's treatment of the angels, in fact, frequently reveals an intensification and elaboration of positions Luther had taken in previous works.⁷¹

In his *Sermon on the Angels*, Luther writes that an "understanding of and knowledge about the dear angels should and must remain among the Christians."⁷² In the words of Luther:

When opinions about the angels emerge from popular lore without insight into the purpose for which the angels are ordained, then confusion ensues. We witness such confusion every day. It is consequently of the essence that we have an idea about the office and activities of the angels. When clear insight therein is missing, we are faced with foolish, unseemly thoughts and fables about the angelic. We see that this is how it has developed; for Saint Michael's Festival has so far been a feast of sheer idolatry... Thus one has fallen away from God and paid all the attention to the dear angels. But we do not observe the Festival for angel worship's sake. We observe it because in this way we come to know what the angels after all do and what their work and office is, for which they are ordained.⁷³

The preceding texts and the following reflections provide a basis for what I understand to be Luther's angelology. Although the subsequent findings may not offer a full picture, they suggest common themes found in the texts studied thus far. Continued research is recommended on this topic because relatively little writing has been done thus far.⁷⁴ More importantly, Luther's angelology provides the reader with insight into God's relationship with human beings. Let us embark on a similar journey that Luther did on that St. Michael's day, September 29, 1530.

⁷¹ Ibid., 77.

⁷² Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 1.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ In 1982, David M. Wagner of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN, completed a similar project to this to fulfill the requirements for a Master of Divinity Degree. Wagner's work offers a parallel project from a Missouri Synod standpoint, and a source of direction for this research. Even though this paper does not devote significant attention to Wagner's conclusions, it uses Wagner's work as a resource for direction and ideas for avenues to pursue. [David M. Wagner, *The Angelology of Dr. Martin Luther* (Unpublished Thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1982).]

II. Luther's Angelology

Martin Luther has revealing references to angels in many popular writings. The task now is to assemble these scattered pieces into a more coherent understanding of Luther's angelology. Beginning with the creation story, Luther writes that a distinct division of the angels produced those that are both good and bad. Luther then forms an understanding of the form, characteristics, and nature of angels. He also identifies the realm in which angels reside. According to Luther, an angel can play a variety of roles in the world, serving as a guardian, governor, defender, comforter, friend, messenger, or glorifier. Luther also identifies the limits of angels when in comparison to God the Almighty, but shows that angels do help human beings understand what a relationship with God does, in fact, look like.

a. Angels in the Creation Story

First of all, where did Luther see the angels fitting into the creation story? Luther is sure not to group Christ⁷⁵ with the angels: "He is not to be counted among the angels; but He is the Lord and Creator of the angels and of all creatures, as Paul states in the first chapter of Colossians (1:16): 'Through Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, both thrones and dominions.'"⁷⁶ According to Luther, the angels were not responsible

⁷⁵ Luther maintains that God as Father, and God as Son, were together at the time of creation. This assertion is based on John 1:2.

⁷⁶ Martin Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4," ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Vol. 22 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 15. *Hereafter cited as LW*. (If one is confused on how God the Son, and God the Father are one, turn to Luther's explanation of the Trinity, found in *LW*, vol. 22, page 16: "The Word, which is the Son, and God the Father are two Persons but nevertheless one God.")

for any creative works, for this is only a divine work of the true God.⁷⁷ Luther also recognizes that humankind was not created in the likeness of the angels, or vice versa, but that “both man and the angels were created in the likeness of God.”⁷⁸ Luther adds that, “Any man is a great miracle per se; and even if the whole world and the angels were to gather all their strength, they could not create even one hair on a human being.”⁷⁹ Angels could not have helped with the original creation of the world, for God alone is the Creator.

As to when the angels were created, Luther writes, “The Arians imagined that angels and the Son of God were made before ‘the beginning.’ But let us pass by this blasphemy.”⁸⁰ Angels were then created by God sometime during creation, but Luther recognizes the little information available: “there is no doubt that the angels were created. But concerning their creation, their battle, and their fall there is nothing at all in Scripture.”⁸¹ Martin Luther knew that he could only make suggestions, not necessarily conclusions, about ambiguous ideas in the Creation story. Thus, “where the scriptures then are silent, Luther argues, Christians too, should retain their silence.”⁸² In other words, Luther is careful here not to make conclusions outside of what can be found in Scripture.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

⁷⁸ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14,” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 2 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 227.

⁷⁹ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44,” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 7 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 71.

⁸⁰ Martin Luther, “A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis” in *Luther’s Works* 1, ed. by John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in all Lands Co., 1904), 12.

⁸¹ Ibid., 22.

⁸² Luther, *LW* 1, pg. 23, as quoted in Soergel, 78.

In his analysis of the creation story, Luther continues to identify a separation of angelic powers: “it is sufficient for us to know that there are good and evil angels and that God created all of them alike, as good. From this it follows necessarily that the evil angels fell and did not stand in the truth. How this came about is unknown.”⁸³ Although not drawing conclusions, Luther does offer possible insight into the cause of this separation. He writes in his interpretation of Genesis 4:2 that when the gifted angels in heaven began to be proud and rejected the humility of the Son of God, they were hurled into hell and became the most hideous devils.⁸⁴ Luther also offers a position maintained by Bernard of Clairvaux, which in summary states that the archfiend named Lucifer fell and was evicted from heaven because he had foreknowledge of God’s plan to become human, and not an angel. The fallen angels had a jealous spirit towards humankind, pride in their angelic nature, and insolence against God.⁸⁵ This split of the angels shows when angels were created, they were not incapable of sinning. Luther had a pastoral intent for this message, as he warned Christians about falling into the sin of pride. Following the split, the angels of God that remained in their created state continued to exist and were forever confirmed in the state of innocence.⁸⁶ In conclusion, even though there may not be sufficient information on the creation of angels, Luther is certain that at some point, the angels were split into the eternally good angels, and the fallen angels, or the devil.

In many of Luther’s writings on angels, he pays much attention to the fallen angels. In his *Sermon on the Angels*, Luther writes:

⁸³ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 244.

⁸⁵ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 103-104.

⁸⁶ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 118.

We consider it beyond a doubt that there is a devil and that he is so near us as to be closer than the shirt on our body... He (the devil) circumambulates your daily work and leisure, to see if he might devour you, fired by unspeakable fury. He talks 'like a roaring lion' all around you, that is to say, he wants you to do his devilish bidding by insinuating himself into your thinking and your reading, into your work and your leisure. But few people believe this. If we really believed it, we would not live in such security. This is the way the world becomes loaded with envy, hatred, pride, evil desire, unchastity and such vices. It gulped down the devil long ago and continued on its way in false security.⁸⁷

To Luther, the devil is responsible for the evil workings described here, but also misfortune.

Luther comments that "Somebody breaks a leg, another drowns, a third one commits murder – who sets up all such things? No one but the devil."⁸⁸ Before Luther touches on the topic of good angels in this sermon, he greatly elaborates on the presence of the devil in this world.

In this sermon, Luther also writes that the devil obsesses people in two ways: those bodily obsessed, and those spiritually obsessed. He provides a vivid description of those that are spiritually obsessed by the devil:

They are full of greed, hatred, envy, unchastity, and so on, to the point of choking, yet walk around seemingly secure, in the belief that the devil is more than a hundred thousand miles away. So, when something is amiss regarding their bodily health and they fall ill, they promptly run to the physician asking his counsel. But it never occurs to them to master and abstain from the greed, hatred, and envy lodged in their hearts. Why is this so? Because no one wants to believe that the devil is so near all around us.⁸⁹

Luther clearly shows that one must acknowledge the reality and presence of the devil, since he harms the soul with false teaching, evil lust, and despair.⁹⁰ The devil has been actively at work in the world, since the original fall of the angels.

⁸⁷ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 2. (Luther is referring to 1 Peter 5:8).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Luther spent much more time focusing on the fallen angels than on those deemed good, making it much easier to find his understanding of the devil than it is on angels. Why is this so?

In his *Sermon on the Angels*, Luther writes:

If one does not know that the devil is very close, one loses awareness of the kind of help that God makes available to us through his angels. It would be like someone who is not acquainted with the thought of death. He cannot know how meaningful life is. Or like a person who has never starved. He does not know how precious and valuable the dear bread is.⁹¹

Luther continues, “if there were no devil, we would become lifeless, lazy, and leaden.”⁹² The devil helps a Christian understand their utter dependence on God, as well as provide a lens for how God uses angels in the world.

The remainder of this paper will seek to develop an understanding of the good angels. In order to do so, one must first be introduced to Luther’s view of the devil, because it provides a framework to understand more fully good angels and the way God works in the world. Luther concludes, “we remain out of harm’s way because God fights the devil through his dear angels.”⁹³ Peter Soergel writes that “Luther is quick to remind his listeners that the good angels’ powers far exceed those of Satan... These spirits act constantly to overcome the evils that the devil places in ordinary Christians’ way.”⁹⁴ According to Luther, the angels are much more powerful than the devils, because they are on the side of the One whose name is Omnipotence,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 3.

⁹³ Ibid., 4. [See also Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 6 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 88.]

⁹⁴ Soergel, 76.

the Almighty.⁹⁵ The powerful good angels abound. Luther also explains that Christians are responsible to formulate an understanding of angels, partly because of the devil.

Let us, I repeat, acknowledge and learn what the task and work of the good angels is like. As the evil angels think of nothing but harmful actions, the good angels are likewise always surrounding us in order to help us so that we remain in the truth and so that, despite the threat of the devil, we may keep unharmed our body and life, wife and child and all that we have.⁹⁶

Dr. Darrell Jodock⁹⁷ adds that Luther had other reasons for giving attention to the devil. He had a lively sense of spiritual conflict between (on the one hand) the devil and bad angels and (on the other hand) God and the good angels. Bad angels indicate a dynamic sense of evil forces at work, just as good angels show an active God at work. Within this framework, let us continue a further exploration of Luther's understanding of the good angels.

b. Nature of angels

Luther's writings on the Creation story show that he recognized angels as a genuine presence, and not an imagined perception. Luther writes, "For it is certain that the church and the angels of God are honoring us,"⁹⁸ and identifies angels as one of God's most outstanding creations.⁹⁹ Even within this certainty there is mystery. On one hand, angels do not have flesh,

⁹⁵ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁷ Dr. Darrell Jodock, personal conversations with author, Gustavus Adolphus College, spring semester, 2009.

⁹⁸ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44*, LW 7, 98.

⁹⁹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, LW 2, 3.

as humans do, but they have been created as spirits.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, Luther does not dismiss the possibility that angels can maintain human form.

It is a regular practice of the angels to appear in human form, either of a young or of an old person. Just as we do not always wear the same garment but, though we now put on one and now another, lose or change nothing of our body, so the angels remain the same spirits even if they do not always show themselves to people in the same form but change it like a garment.¹⁰¹

Luther argues that angels appear in human form because humans cannot recognize a spirit, but can see an image.¹⁰² Angels are also able to adapt to human speech.¹⁰³ In this way, angels are made available to humans in a way that God cannot. Luther also understands angels as spirits incapable of reproduction, and thus are not subject to the temptations and sins common to the human estate.¹⁰⁴ Although Luther mentions physical characteristics of angels, such as when they appeared clad in white robes at the resurrection of Christ, he also identifies their spiritual life as absent from the physical needs of food, drink, and rest.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, LW 1, 86.

¹⁰¹ Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20," ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 3 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 61.

¹⁰² *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, LW 2, 46. [Luther also makes an interesting note, when writing about Psalm 104:3, which reads "Who makest the cloud Thy chariot, who walkest upon the wings of the winds." Luther writes "The wings are the two testaments, and these two wings of the individuals are joined, because the old and the new law come together, just as the old man is slain and the new man is revived. Hence also the angels are painted and molded with two wings, and the cherubim likewise. For every teacher ought to have the two testaments." Martin Luther, "First Lectures on the Psalms II: Psalms 76-126," ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 11 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 322].

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁴ Soergel, 79. (Reference to Vol. 1 of Luther's Works, 107-108).

¹⁰⁵ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, LW 1, 86.

Luther consistently attacked received scholastic notions of celestial hierarchies and terms such as cherubim, seraphim, and archangel. He did, however, remark on their physical features:

It seems to be that “cherub” denotes the ruddy face which girls and boys have at an early age. Thus painters also depict the angels in the likeness of infants. By cherubim, therefore, you may understand angels who appear with a face that is not wrinkled or sad, but with a happy and friendly expression, with a chubby and well-rounded face, whether this be a human face or some other.¹⁰⁶

Luther also writes that angels do not necessarily have wings, but they cannot be depicted otherwise. Thus, cherubs are angels who fly with a glad and handsome face. If luster is added, then they are called “seraphim.”¹⁰⁷ To Luther, these words merely referred to the contrasting anthropomorphic forms angels took when they appeared to human beings, as they could adopt the image of a young child or an old man.¹⁰⁸

Aside from the fluid physical features, good angels possess certain personality characteristics. According to Luther, they are merciful, peaceable,¹⁰⁹ humble, pleasant, and kind—willing to serve even the most wretched sinners.¹¹⁰ Luther writes that angels are innocent beyond an attainable human standard¹¹¹ and extremely intellectual.¹¹² Angels are also obedient

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 235.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 236.

¹⁰⁸ Soergel, 79.

¹⁰⁹ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 179.

¹¹⁰ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 4 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 255.

¹¹¹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, LW 1, 111.

¹¹² Ibid., 112.

to God, realizing whatever God commands is best simply because it pleases God.¹¹³ After analyzing Genesis 8:22, Luther concludes that the life of an angel is to know God, delight in the wisdom of God, and to enjoy the presence of God.¹¹⁴

These physical features and personality characteristics portray angels as relatable to human beings. One of Luther's key teachings was the graciousness of God. God is infinite in ways that human beings cannot articulate. Even though angels are still mysterious, and rightfully so, Luther teaches that they have the ability to appear in human form. Therefore, God understands that human beings could be so overwhelmed by or possibly blind to God's presence, that an angel may be a more appropriate way to communicate.

Where then, according to Luther, are the angels? Luther spends a significant amount of time referring to a dream of Jacob's in Genesis 28:12.¹¹⁵ The ladder in this dream is depicted by Luther metaphorically to mean that angels ascend and descend on Christ or upon Christ. To Luther, this angelic ladder provides humans with an idea of what it is like to look through the eyes of an angel. The angels ascend and see the Son of God, who is begotten from eternity. On the other hand, they descend when they see Him born in time of Mary. God is simultaneously both the highest and the lowest, and the angels get to see both of God's entities completely united. Luther writes that without this dream of Jacob's, the domain of angels would be incomprehensible for human reason.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 255.

¹¹⁴ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, LW 2, 130.

¹¹⁵ "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."

¹¹⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 89.

This angelic lens that Luther envisions may give insight into how angels see humankind. Perhaps angels are simultaneously and incomprehensibly connected to both humans and the Almighty God. Luther sees the church as one place where angels are active. In support of this, Luther cites Psalm 34:7 “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them,”¹¹⁷ Where God dwells, there the guardian angels are.¹¹⁸ Luther advises that if one is seeking to see angels at work in the world, it may be a difficult task.

All of the angelic happenings occur secretly, in the invisible, just as the devil obsesses people secretly, in the invisible. For instance, he may stuff a person’s heart full with envy but at the same time stealthily and deceptively turn that person’s mind into believing that the feeling is nothing but a natural concern for how to feed himself and his children; he also makes him believe that he, the devil, is far away from him... Just as the devil obsesses men in the invisible, the good angels also carry out their task in secret. Just as the devil from invisible realms shoots arrows of evil into our hearts, the good angels shoot arrows of goodness into our hearts. Where the devil assaults us the angels are promptly on the spot and put up resistance and whisper into the heart; ‘Oh, keep away.’¹¹⁹

The invisible feature of angels is frustrating, but ultimately beneficial as it may indicate how they can battle the devil within a realm closer to a person than one’s own skin.

c. Activity of angels

One of Luther’s most central themes understands God to be active in the world. God is not a micromanager, or a “control freak.” God is instead involved in the struggles of people, working through whatever means necessary to do what God wants to accomplish. God is omnipotent in the sense of all empowering. What one learns about Luther’s concept of God

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 45-50,” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 8 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 59-60.

¹¹⁸ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 182.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

being active in the world is that God's activity never undermines or takes away the freedom of creatures, and therefore human beings have a responsibility to communicate, and to allow themselves to do something. What Luther says about the activity of angels gives insight into how Luther sees God active in the world.

Luther refers to angels in a variety of active roles in the world. He refers to Abraham's belief in angels in Genesis 24:5-7 as an example. Abraham is fully convinced that "because we have the God of heaven and earth, the angels are our protectors, guardians, yes, our attendants, wherever we are."¹²⁰ In his *Sermon on the Angels*, Luther stresses the importance of learning about angels: "We should see and know the nature of their work and office, done for God and us...each person must certainly sense and know within himself that there are angels."¹²¹ Luther teaches that angels are not just spending time praying in a remote heaven, but with God's help, are immediately at hand. "Peace, security, and joy of spirit follow this faith in any trial whatever, because I am sure than even if many evils beset me, angels nevertheless watch over and guard me."¹²² To Luther, angels are valid beings actively involved in a world close to one's own proximity, and therefore are important to learn about.

Throughout his reflections on Genesis, Luther often refers to angels as guardians, or protectors. "When we are engaged in our calling and in the performance of our duty, by a command either from God or from men who have the legitimate right to call upon us, then let us

¹²⁰ Ibid., 253. (Wagner comments that the greatest concern of Luther's angelology "is that of the angel's activities." Wagner, 39).

¹²¹ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 1.

¹²² *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 254.

believe that we shall not lack the protection of the angels.”¹²³ This role as protector is, according to David Wagner, the activity of angels that interests Luther the most.¹²⁴ Luther used the story of Jacob¹²⁵ and Hagar¹²⁶ as evidence. In his reflections on the Gospel of St. John, Luther writes:

Here are the angels to ward off the bloodhounds and their conspiracies at the courts of cardinals and bishops, who never lack counsel and wisdom, intrigue and power, cunning and all sorts of plots for our extermination. But we hear that the angels are present. And therefore, by the grace of God, we still survive the wrath and the determination of our sworn and mortal enemies. On our side we have the dear angels, who descend from heaven and ascend again, providing for us and watching over us.¹²⁷

To Luther, it is impossible for human beings who believe in God’s word to be forsaken and not defended by the angels.¹²⁸ Luther says, “when we are under the protection of God, there is no doubt that we are also under the safekeeping and guardianship of the angels, who are present with those who are encountering dangers in life.”¹²⁹ Angels illustrate the way in which God protects the world.

¹²³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, LW 1, 108.

¹²⁴ Wagner, 66.

¹²⁵ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 41.

¹²⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, LW 3, 60.

¹²⁷ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 205.

¹²⁸ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 41.

¹²⁹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 41-42. (In his *Sermons on the Gospel of Saint John*, Luther provides a similar illustration: “But we can rest assured that the dear angels surround us and take care that no harm befall us. Indeed, no hair of ours can be touched unless it pleases Him who sits enthroned above, who sends His angels up and down to us to carry our prayer up to Him and to return to us with the message of prayers fulfilled. If the angels did not guard us and ascend and descend upon the body of Christ—that is upon us—and did not remain with us, our adversaries would long since have devoured us alive” *LW*, Vol. 22, 205).

Luther makes a strong case against belief in good luck, for in all cases where one narrowly escapes misfortune, it is indeed the direct result of the angels.¹³⁰ In his *Lectures on Zechariah* Luther confirms the idea of an individual's guardian angel: "And so every emperor, king, prince, master, indeed every man has his angel, whether the emperor or his empire be Christian or not."¹³¹ A Christian becomes more aware of the angels' protection through trials and experience battling the devil.¹³² Luther continues that angels protect human beings from Satan and danger by speaking to their hearts,¹³³ connecting the way angels work in the world with one's inner feelings, or perhaps conscience.

¹³⁰ Martin Luther, "Lectures on Zechariah," ed. Hilton C. Oswald, vol. 20 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 170. (Full quotation: "Thus it happens to many a man that he will escape fire, water, murder, and other misfortunes because of some insignificant thing that has moved him. Such a thought, or whatever it may be, comes to him so that he does, all at once, the thing that saves him, a thing which he could never have foreseen or thought beforehand but of which he must say, 'Indeed, if I had done this or that, I surely should have drowned, been burned to death or murdered, or died or suffered harm in some other way'; or, as someone else might say, 'You had your guardian angel with you there.' The Gentiles therefore ascribed such happenings to good fortune and made an idol of fortune. For they saw and learned that such things happened but did not know that the true God had done them through His holy angels... Thus it is with all men when they escape misfortune or have good fortune: it is all the work of God and the angels").

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹³² *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, LW 5, 63. (In the *Sermon on the Angels*, Luther writes: "We have said that the wicked angels do not sleep; they strive day and night to bring about idolatry, to murder souls, also to harm our bodies, our possessions, our honor and so forth. If God, then, did not have another dispensation against this assault, the devil would not for a moment leave your house, spouse and brood alone. All of it would fall in shambles. For he is poisonous enough to begrudge you even the tiny space you need to put a foot on. He resents that your eyes, arms and legs are healthy. If he were empowered to do it, he would not let a cow, not a goose live on your property. In sum, if he had the say, he would not let a single stick remain standing, no he would not let a single human live another moment. That all this does not happen and that you are still alive depends on the order of the angels." Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 3.)

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 5. (Full quotation: "As when someone is about to drown in deep water and I am at that place and pull him up, thereby saving his life, in a similar way the good angels deal with someone in danger; they speak to his heart, they turn him around, saying: 'This you must not do,'

Luther writes that God governs this entire¹³⁴ visible world not only through humans but also angels.¹³⁵ He describes the role of angels as governors as “their lower office.”¹³⁶ Angels govern the world similarly to the way in which they protect human beings.

This text in Zechariah, however, is one of those words from which one learns how God rules the world by means of the angels, though of course He does everything by Himself. For God has instituted a fourfold rule: one, in which He works by Himself alone, without the cooperation of His creatures and in which things run their course solely and alone through His might. He acts in this way when He creates and multiplies His creatures, preserves them, and gives them various powers and skills. In this rule no one assists Him. In the second he puts such created and preserved creatures into the care of His angels so that these might lead, guide, preserve, guard, and help these creatures, and especially us men, from without. For from within the One God alone preserves and helps. But while the angels, to be sure, do not help from within, as God does, they nevertheless do their part from without by inspiring men with good, useful, or necessary thoughts and by keeping or removing evil, harmful thoughts from them. In this way they help to preserve and improve men and creatures outwardly, which God alone does inwardly.¹³⁷

and so forth. Thus they protect us so that we don’t fall away from faith entirely. Hence we have the saying – and that is indeed well said: ‘You had a good angel today.’ This amounts to the following, in other words: Reason would not have been able to avert the evil, had it not been for the angels; without them the devil would have organized a calamity in no time at all.”)

¹³⁴ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 89. (“Accordingly, this is a truly heavenly doctrine and not a matter of human reason and wisdom that in this life empires, states, and households, and, in short, whatever this world has are all governed by the ministry of the holy angels.”)

¹³⁵ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, LW 3, 270.

¹³⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 87-88. (Their higher office is to glorify God, see footnote 166.)

¹³⁷ *Lectures on Zechariah*, LW. 20, 169-170. (The third rule is that which God carries on through men, such as apostles and preachers, and the fourth rule is the secular government, which comprehends the rule of the home and the authority of parents over their children. An interesting note is that God also works through angels in the third rule, as Luther writes, “Thus also through the angels, as fellow workers and His assistants, He helps and saves all men and does not desire to teach without the preachers or help without the angels.” LW 20, 171).

The angels therefore, work together with human beings to govern the world, according to God's plan. "God no longer wants to act in accordance with His extraordinary or, as the scholastics express it, absolute power but wants to act through His creatures, whom He does not want to be idle... This they call God's 'ordered' power, namely when he makes use of the service either of angels or of human beings."¹³⁸ Luther writes that the fact that all goes fairly well is proof that God has instituted a great dominion, providing shelter against evil.¹³⁹ Luther confirms the premise of angels that maintain order and peace: "Let us therefore learn that the government of the angels is certain."¹⁴⁰ This observation transitions into a different but not completely separate characteristic of angels as defenders.

Luther cites angels as defenders of the good from the enemy Satan, who sometimes disguises himself as an angel of light.¹⁴¹ There are good angels who "fight for the safety and welfare of the world and godly,"¹⁴² but they are perpetually engaged in disputing with and refuting the devil.¹⁴³ Luther also points out that, ironically, good angels sometimes defend humans indirectly by permitting bad things to happen. "But they do this so that we may be tried

¹³⁸ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, LW 3, 274.

¹³⁹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, LW 3, 270-271. ("The good angels are busy in order that the fierce enemy may not inflict harm. Neither medicine nor other means would be effective by themselves if the angels were not present. And the fact that new remedies become known when new diseases make their appearance— this is not a matter of the diligence of human beings; it is a service of the angels, who direct and urge on the hearts of the physicians, just as Satan directs and urges on his own.")

¹⁴⁰ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 93.

¹⁴¹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44*, LW 7, 279.

¹⁴² *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 92.

¹⁴³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 265.

and that our faith may be proved and exercised and that in this way we may learn to recognize God in His wonderful counsels and works and give thanks to Him for His wonderful government.”¹⁴⁴ In order for the defense to be most powerful, the human must first correctly understand its source.

Besides defending humans from evil, angels also serve as comforters to those in struggle. Angels can calm those who are apprehensive through words such as, “Do not fear.” “The angel comes as a comforter and brings nothing but solace from God Himself.”¹⁴⁵ To Luther, angels give the assurance that God’s promises are certain.¹⁴⁶ To emphasize to believers that they are under God’s protection, Luther writes, “the godly should comfort themselves in this manner: ‘I know that I have guardian angels; but that I have to bear some misfortune, this I leave to the will of God. For I am in the camp of the angels. God is not a liar. Therefore He will not forsake me.’”¹⁴⁷ Angels comfort by helping human beings realize the power and protection of God.

In this compassionate sense, Luther also depicts angels as a human’s companion, or friend. In his reflections on the Psalms, he writes:

Your Royal Majesty¹⁴⁸ should learn to trust solely in the true Father who is in heaven, to find your comfort in the true Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, who is also our Brother, indeed our flesh and blood, and to take delight in your real friends and true companions, the holy angels, who surround us and take care of us.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 92.

¹⁴⁵ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 63.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁴⁷ Luther, Martin, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 5 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 62.

¹⁴⁸ Luther is referring to Queen Mary of Hungary.

¹⁴⁹ Martin Luther, “Selected Psalms III,” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 14 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 210. (This letter to Queen Mary of Hungary

After being freed from sin, Luther writes Christians are in the company of the angels of God and have become partakers of eternal life.¹⁵⁰ Luther occasionally refers to angels as brothers¹⁵¹ or servants.¹⁵² Luther even writes that “our best and most steadfast friends are invisible, namely, the angels, who in their faithfulness, goodwill, and friendly services far surpass our visible friends.”¹⁵³ In God’s eternal kingdom, Luther writes that Christians are celestial citizens, who live in the company of the dear angels, where they converse with each other.¹⁵⁴ In the life after this, those that accompany the good angels will not have to support the needs of the body,¹⁵⁵ they can worship with the angels in the most pure form,¹⁵⁶ and gladly do God’s will together.¹⁵⁷

According to Luther, angels care about the lives of their human friends. The following description of an angel’s relationship to human beings also indicates the way God prefers a relationship with humans.

Here you see what favorable and great friends of ours they are, for they are willing to favor us no less than themselves; they rejoice over our salvation as if it

was dedicated on November 1, 1526, which indicates a reference of angels from reflections on Psalms that follows Luther’s tower experience.)

¹⁵⁰ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, LW 2, 261.

¹⁵¹ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 88.

¹⁵² Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Vol. 24 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 180.

¹⁵³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 265.

¹⁵⁴ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 203.

¹⁵⁵ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, LW 2, 129-130.

¹⁵⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, LW 1, 106.

¹⁵⁷ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 179.

were their own, so that they give us in their song a comforting inducement to regard them as one would his best friends. This is the right understanding concerning angels, not understanding them with respect to their essence, a topic treated by the sophisticated teachers without success, but with respect to their innermost heart, disposition, and mind. When I do not know what they are but know what their highest desire is and in what they are constantly engaged, then I see into their heart! Let this suffice concerning the Gospel.¹⁵⁸

If one thinks of angels only in a hovering protecting or governing role, one misses the important understanding of angels as close companions. In the same way, God is active in a down to earth, compassionate way that shows unconditional love for human beings.

Arguably the most important role of angels in the world is their ability to be God's messengers. David Wagner expands the understanding of angels as 'messengers' to God's 'representatives.'¹⁵⁹ Luther claims to follow the authority of Scripture, which says God is speaking when either angels or saintly humans speak as a result either of the command or of the revelation of God.¹⁶⁰ Luther even refers to preachers as angels, in the sense of God's messengers.¹⁶¹ In the example where an angel spoke the message to Moses at Mount Sinai, Luther comments that the angel "spoke just as if God himself were speaking."¹⁶² The saving intervention of an angel's message is depicted as Abraham almost sacrificed his own son Isaac in Genesis 22. Luther writes that the angel cried out and called Abraham by name.¹⁶³ Evidence of

¹⁵⁸ Martin Luther, "The Gospel for Christmas Eve, Luke 2[:1-14]," in *Sermons II*, ed. E. Hans Hillerbrand, vol. 52 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 30.

¹⁵⁹ Wagner, 42.

¹⁶⁰ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, LW 3, 219-220.

¹⁶¹ *Sermons II*, LW. 52, 24-25.

¹⁶² Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," in *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. 35 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 163.

¹⁶³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 122-123.

Luther's understanding of angels as messengers is especially apparent in his hymns, most notably in his famous Christmas hymn, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," as the angels bring the news of Christ's birth to the shepherds.¹⁶⁴ In Luther's view, angels are nearby, and prepared to be God's messengers at any moment.

The roles mentioned thus far show how angels relate to humans, but they also serve as glorifiers in relation to God. In a sermon Luther preached one Christmas Eve, he explained the phrase, "Gloria in excelsis deo." "They enumerate three things in this song: honor, peace, and good pleasure or good will. Honor they give to God, peace to the earth, and good pleasure to men."¹⁶⁵ Bringing honor to God is referred to as the higher office of angels.¹⁶⁶ In this sermon on Christmas Eve, Luther writes that the angels could not be pictured any better than they are when they praise God with humble, pure, obedient, and joyful hearts.¹⁶⁷ The second item angels enumerate is peace on earth, for Luther maintains that true Christians cannot feud, bicker, or be hostile towards one another.¹⁶⁸ Thirdly, Luther remarks that angels also delight at the good will of humans, when Christians accomplish marvelous works, and terrify the demons.¹⁶⁹ These wonderful works that the angels celebrate are victory over death, the destruction of sin, etc.

¹⁶⁴ Pick, 36. (W.G. Polack in his *Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal* quotes Lauxmann, who states that Luther had a man dressed as an angel sing these stanzas.)

¹⁶⁵ *Sermons II*, LW 52, 27.

¹⁶⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, LW 6, 92. (The lower office of angels is that of governing, referenced in footnote 136.)

¹⁶⁷ *Sermons II*, LW. 52, 29-30.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶⁹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, LW 5, 120-121.

Luther sees the slave Joseph¹⁷⁰ as a true martyr, who brought a sacrifice that was precious in the sight of God and the angels. “How the angels must have rejoiced!”¹⁷¹ Angels glorify and sing praises to God, and for godly deeds done on the earth.

Luther characterizes angels as protectors, governors, defenders, comforters, companions, messengers of God, and glorifiers. Independently from God, the angels could not perform any of these activities. Since God created them in a way that humans could conceive, angels showcase God’s activity in the world. The roles that angels play are indicative of a God-human relationship.¹⁷² Therefore, God as comforter and as companion makes sense. Angels bring the message of God, either in words or in presence.

d. Response to angels

Once exposed to angels, humans unsurprisingly respond in a variety of ways. Luther sees that the angel’s majesty can spark fear in the eyes of the human being.¹⁷³ In his Christmas Eve Sermon, Luther writes that “The first thing an angel does is to frighten the shepherds.”¹⁷⁴ If God

¹⁷⁰ Genesis 29:19 refers to a slave whose name was Joseph. He was put in prison by a dishonest slave owner who wrongly accused him of sleeping with her. In prison, Joseph was blessed by the care of God, and was treated with respect and dignity.

¹⁷¹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44*, LW 7, 99. (In his Sermon on Christmas Eve, Luther references John 16:33, “In me you shall have peace, in the world you will have tribulation.”)

¹⁷² Terrence Fretheim, the Elva B. Lovell Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, teaches about the implications of God in relationship to human beings. He says that God is greatly affected by what happens in our relationship. [Terrence Fretheim, “Implications of a God in Relationship” (public lecture, Gustavus Adolphus College, Saint Peter, MN, April 25th, 2009).]

¹⁷³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 129.

¹⁷⁴ *Sermons II*, LW 52, 25-26.

intended for angels to be a more comprehensible manifestation of God than God's own self, imagine what reactions God's revelation would bring. A counterexample of this reaction is of Hagar in Genesis 21. Luther writes,

It may be surprising that Hagar did not become frightened and flee when she heard the angel's voice in the desert. But I have stated that her mind was benumbed by such a great stupor that she did not think about who was speaking. Similarly, when Peter, who is in prison, is awakened by the angel and led out of the prison, he does not know that this is really taking place but thinks that something like it is happening to him in a dream (Acts 12:9). But the angel undoubtedly appeared in human form.¹⁷⁵

These examples also show that, according to Luther, humans may not always realize the presence of an angel. Even when there is recognition, doubt is not necessarily removed. "Even though we know that we have guardian angels, nevertheless we are often in doubt, and therefore we fear and tremble; for the curse and unbelief are the reason for our doubting and are an obstacle to us in faith."¹⁷⁶ Perhaps Luther was suggesting that if one believes in angels, they will be better able to recognize them.

Luther himself provided an inconsistent human response to the presence of angels. In both Luther's morning and evening prayers of the *Small Catechism*, Luther prays "Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen." Luther confirms that humans are enjoying the companionship of these heavenly spirits, and that it is fitting to give God thanks. In his *Sermon on the Angels*, Luther's stance is unwavering: "this is the proper way to praise and revere the angels: 'Dear Lord God, I thank you that you have taken care of and

¹⁷⁵ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 58.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

protected us through your angels and that you placed such princes over us.”¹⁷⁷ He also wrote, “If anything good happens, it is performed entirely by the good angels.”¹⁷⁸ These clear statements have a bold claim and an indirect demand: pray to God for the protection of angels.

Luther has also written statements in his Genesis reflections which may at first appear to conflict with this stance. “Hence I am not concerned about angels, and I have the habit of praying God daily not to send any angel to me for any reason whatever. But if one were to present himself, I would not listen to him; but I would turn away.”¹⁷⁹ This statement seems to oppose the prayer Luther teaches. He also writes in his reflections on Galatians, “I would rather that the holiness not only of the papists and fanatics but even of the angels be eternally rejected and condemned, along with the devil! I refuse to look at anything except this Christ.”¹⁸⁰ This stance indicates that angels do matter, but something else matters more.

Luther is teaching here to recognize the limits of angels, the almighty power of God, and the mercy through Jesus Christ. “I always asked the Lord not to send me dreams, visions, or angels. For if I have the Word of God, I know that I am proceeding on the right way and cannot easily be deceived or go wrong.”¹⁸¹ This seems to return to the idea that the presence of Christ is

¹⁷⁷ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 126.

¹⁸⁰ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians-1535: Chapters 1-4” in *Lectures on Galatians*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, vol. 26 of *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 182.

¹⁸¹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44*, LW 7, 119.

more important than the existence of angels.¹⁸² Does Luther's prayer for God to send the protection of the body of angels contradict his point here to pray for God not to send an angel for any reason whatsoever?

d. Limits of angels

Angels have limits, especially in comparison to God. The creation story demonstrates that even angels are fallible. Some originally good angels fell with Satan into hell. Luther sees this fall as a consequence of pride they had in the greatness and excellence of their gifts.¹⁸³ In other words, "God utterly rejects those who are angels in their own eyes."¹⁸⁴ Satan, still however, can emerge in the guise of an angel or even of God Himself, putting himself forward with very sly pretense and tricks.¹⁸⁵ Luther comments that not only are angels charged with error,¹⁸⁶ but they also cannot endure God's judgment.¹⁸⁷ Luther states, "It is clear that we do not worship the angels, nor do we put our ultimate trust in them."¹⁸⁸ Anyone, or anything, in comparison to the wonderful and incomprehensible wisdom of God, does not deserve praise.

¹⁸² Insight offered from Dr. Darrell Jodock, the Drell and Adeline Bernhardson Distinguished Professor at Gustavus Adolphus College.

¹⁸³ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 257.

¹⁸⁴ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*, LW 2, 169.

¹⁸⁵ *Lectures on Galatians*, LW 26, 49.

¹⁸⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 61.

¹⁸⁷ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, LW 1, 296.

¹⁸⁸ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 5.

The gospel of faith is sufficient for any Christian to obtain knowledge of God. This emphasis on God is undoubtedly necessary, and has been reflected in Lutheran teachings.

Therefore the way in which one prays for angels is as follows:

When we know the true place of the angels, then we also begin to thank God for them. We do so by the same token as we thank him for having created the sun and the moon, for creating and giving peace, unity, justice and whatever else is good in the world. When I say this, I am not saying that I wish to worship the sun and the moon on that account. No, that is not the idea. The meaning is rather that, in and through the sun, I praise and worship God, who has created her.¹⁸⁹

Luther made sure to understand angels as submissive to God. He revised the hymn, “God the Father, Be Our Stay,” removing the invocations to Mary, the angels, and the saints.¹⁹⁰

The angels are not to be prayed to, or worshipped.

When studying his angelology, this submission to God may be the point Luther makes the most clear. He writes that all the creatures are like drops of water in comparison to the entire ocean.¹⁹¹ Luther places angels as somehow “higher” than humans, but clearly “lower” than God. “Surely we human beings are not lords over the angels; they are over us, and we under them. But this One is placed over them, and the angels themselves call Him Lord. Now, anyone placed above and beyond the angels surely must be God Himself in nature and essence.”¹⁹² Only God gives peace, eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, and deliverance from death and the devil.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹⁰ Polack, 182.

¹⁹¹ *Lectures on Galatians*, LW 26, 107.

¹⁹² Martin Luther, “Selected Psalms II,” ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 13 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 235.

Luther refers to all creatures being completely submissive to God as the principal doctrine of Christianity.¹⁹³ God is Almighty, and therefore the angels cannot be.

It is interesting to notice the way Luther relates the angels to God. Luther will use the phrases, “God and the angels,”¹⁹⁴ or “God and all the angels.”¹⁹⁵ These phrases show that God and the angels are closely related in the mind of Luther.¹⁹⁶ Good angels are also in constant agreement with the Father and Son, for there is no disharmony in heaven. “I, have told you, and I tell you again: ‘Let not your heart be troubled,’ and what I say to you My Father also tells you, and all the angels in heaven say yes to it. There is no other word in heaven than this.”¹⁹⁷ Luther writes that angels have a mirror to look for guidance called the *facies patris*, our Lord God’s face. That is why an angel is so much wiser than all the devils piled in one heap.¹⁹⁸ Luther’s emphasis on God is intentionally clear, but his attention to angels is not absent.

Therefore, the big question remaining is why did Luther rarely write extensively and specifically on angels? He reflected on great multitudes of issues concerning faith, the divine, and the church. Why are angels only mentioned in scattered references, but hardly ever does Luther have an extensive elaboration on their subject? One may also ask why there seems to be many more angel revelations of old rather than new. Luther writes, “For this reason many consider the saintly fathers far more blessed in this respect than we are, since they had such

¹⁹³ *Lectures on Galatians*, LW 26, 106.

¹⁹⁴ LW 4, 212 and 294, LW 6, 94, LW 7, 367, etc.

¹⁹⁵ LW 24, 119, 123, 232, etc.

¹⁹⁶ Wagner, 19.

¹⁹⁷ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16*, LW 24, 184.

¹⁹⁸ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 5.

definite and individual comforts and appearances from God through the ministry of the angels.”¹⁹⁹ Would Luther consider those with fewer angel revelations slighted?

Luther writes that angels do not appear so frequently in contemporary times, because the church now possesses Christ and his Word.²⁰⁰ In his reflections on Galatians, Luther writes, “‘For the Law was given through the angels (Heb. 2:2); but the Gospel through the Lord Himself.’ Therefore the message of the Gospel excels the Law, because the Law is the voice of servants, but the Gospel is the voice of the Lord.”²⁰¹ Angel appearances on earth are now considerably rarer than they had been in the Old Testament.²⁰² Luther refers to angels as unnecessary, because God’s promise has been made manifest in Christ, who humbled Himself

¹⁹⁹ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, LW 5, 21.

²⁰⁰ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, LW 4, 124-125 reads “At this point the question can be raised why the angels have appeared less frequently among us and generally in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. My answer is that this happens because the Son has appeared and has been sent.” (A more detailed explanation is offered in LW 5, page 21: “You have no reason to complain that you have been visited less than Abraham or Isaac. You, too, have appearances, and in a way they are stronger, clearer, and more numerous than those they had, provided that you open your eyes and heart and take hold of them. You have Baptism. You have the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where bread and wine are the species, figures, and forms in which and under which God in person speaks and works into your ears, eyes, and heart. Besides you have the ministry of the Word and teachers through whom God speaks with you. You have the ministry of the Keys, through which He absolves and comforts you. ‘Fear not,’ He says, ‘I am with you.’ He appears to you in Baptism. He baptizes you Himself and addressed you Himself. He not only says: ‘I am with you,’ but, ‘I forgive you your sins. I offer you salvation from death, deliverance from all fear and from the power of the devil and hell, and not only I am with you, but all the angels with Me.’ What more will you desire? Everything is full of divine appearances and conversation.”)

²⁰¹ *Lectures on Galatians*, LW 26, 318.

²⁰² Soergel, 79.

and assumed human flesh. Luther writes, “The angels are much holier than we poor sinners, and yet He adopted our nature and became incarnate from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary.”²⁰³

To Luther, Christ is enough. Careful not to put angels on the same or similar level as the Holy Trinity, Luther rejects angels as any entity that competes with God for glory. Luther still, however, maintains the reality of angels as God’s messengers and tools in the world. Even though angels are unnecessary for faith, their existence and activity is certainly not negated. Therefore, Luther’s emphasis on God’s glory may have distracted Lutheran theology of a worthy recognition of angels as valid active beings. If angels are then adequately acknowledged, there may be a significantly different perception of them within Lutheran teachings.

If angels, however, were more closely connected to Christ, they would be understood differently. In Luther’s reflection of Genesis 48:15, he writes,

Jacob calls God an Angel in the same way in which he said above after the struggle: “I have seen the Lord face to face” (Gen. 32:30). For this Angel is that Lord or Son of God whom Jacob saw and who was to be sent by God into the world to announce to us deliverance from death, the forgiveness of sins, and the kingdom of heaven. And this Angel is our Liberator. He sets us free with perfect justice and liberates us from the power of the devil, who is subject to the Law because he killed the Son of God. Therefore one must note carefully that Jacob is speaking about Christ, the Son, who alone is the Angel.²⁰⁴

In this way, God blesses humankind through His son, the Angel. This Old Testament prophecy unites Jesus Christ and all the angels of heaven. Luther concludes, “We should console and encourage ourselves with the promise and the Word, and we should fear no danger at all as long as we do not deny the Angel.”²⁰⁵ Luther sees Christ as the Angel. He also writes with His

²⁰³ *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, LW 22, 103.

²⁰⁴ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 45-50*, LW 8, 164.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

ascension into heaven, the angels are now subject to Christ.²⁰⁶ This contradicts what Luther previously said about the relationship between Christ and the angels in the creation story. The Christ – angel relationship has apparently changed, but the question remaining is, “how?”

David Wagner investigates the term, “Angel of the Lord,” which many scholars refer to as the uncreated angel, who is the preincarnate Son of God.²⁰⁷ Wagner refers to the Missouri Synod *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, where Walter Wegner lists the following passages where the terms, “the angel of the Lord” or “the angel of God” occur in the book of Genesis.²⁰⁸ Wagner then discovered what Luther wrote about each of these texts. Wagner’s conclusion is as follows:

From these passages in Genesis it can be seen that in general, Luther does not see the angel of the Lord as referring to the preincarnate Christ. In the passages where Luther does see Christ, the terms, “the angel of the Lord” and “the angel of God,” do not occur. One would need to study Luther’s view of Christ in the Old Testament as well as his comments on the angel of the Lord mentioned in other portions of the Old Testament to determine the complete view which Luther has of the angel of the Lord.²⁰⁹

Regardless, the relationship between Christ and the angels is an extremely interesting subject, deserving of future extended research and thought.

At this point, one can follow in Luther’s footsteps by offering only a suggestion, and not necessarily a conclusion. Luther strongly emphasized the danger of paying too much attention to the concept of angels, for it would obscure their accurate relationship to God. However, one can also develop an obscure understanding of angels when one gives them too little attention.

²⁰⁶ *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, LW 5, 220.

²⁰⁷ Wagner, 53.

²⁰⁸ Erwin L. Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), 32. (Specifically Gen. 16:7-14; Gen. 21:17; Gen. 18; Gen. 22:11; Gen. 31: 11-13; Gen. 32:24; and Gen. 48:16.)

²⁰⁹ Wagner, 57.

Without appropriate attention to Luther's understanding of angels, one would miss an opportunity to comprehend the comforting activity and presence of God. Talking about angels is a helpful way to remind ourselves of the relational presence of God. The appearance of Christ has certainly made angels unnecessary, but with the multitude of Luther's claims about the reality and validity of angels, one cannot conclude that Christ has made their presence and activity void. There may have been a transition of some sort, but this extends beyond the boundaries Luther would feel inclined to go.

III. Luther's Orthodox successors

Following Luther, many scholars dismissed or intentionally ignored the possibility of active angels in the world. Luther writes, "Of course, there have been folk who believed nothing and curtly declared: 'There is nothing to this talk about angels.' Such minds were around at the time of Christ, witness the Sadducees. And I have also listened to some of the same ilk in our day."²¹⁰ Emanuel Hirsch, a German Protestant theologian, reduced Luther's angelology and termed what he called the lore of miracle – belief in angels as transmitters of divine communication, the story of the virgin birth – helpful thoughts and nothing more.²¹¹ Philip Soergel writes that Luther left a divided legacy in the church on the topic of angels.²¹² There is an apparent lack of understanding within the ELCA church of today, where Lutherans seem to be ill informed, confused, or simply unaware of Martin Luther's angelology. Jodock remarks that Luther was an occasional writer, using illustrations to make a point that related to the specific circumstances he thought needed to be addressed, and he may have left "gaps."

One period in history that is known for systematically organizing Luther's thoughts into seemingly coherent arguments is referred to as Lutheran Orthodoxy. This period encompasses a group of theologians who attempted to "fill in these gaps." Justo Gonzalez writes that these theologians were to Luther what epigones were to Alexander: a succeeding generation lacking the genius of the founder, but without whom the founder's work would have been in vain.²¹³ One person cannot possibly become a legend alone; someone who goes down in history needs

²¹⁰ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 1.

²¹¹ Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 70.

²¹² Soergel, 82.

²¹³ Gonzalez, 241.

others to tell their story. Without followers, a leader is not a leader at all. As is the case with Martin Luther, as someone with one of the most influential voices in the history of theology, he would not have had the lasting impact without the subsequent theologians who helped spread his teachings to centuries and centuries of ears following the time of his death. The Lutheran Orthodox theologians lifted Luther from his historical context and viewed him as a prophet of indisputable divine truth. Theologians and churchmen wanted to preserve the ‘pure, infallible and unalterable Word of God’ that Luther had rediscovered.²¹⁴ Much of the doctrinal teachings of the Lutheran church today are traced back to the key voices of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Although Lutheran Orthodoxy had many voices, they together worked for a clear, central purpose. At this point in time, Europe was divided, splitting into sections consisting of Roman Catholics in some areas, Lutherans in others, and Reformed (Calvinists) elsewhere. Anchored in a university theology, Lutheran Orthodoxy tried to streamline all of Christian thought and life and provide a single distinctively Lutheran system for the sake of political and ecclesiastical uniformity.²¹⁵ With a practical intent,²¹⁶ Lutheran Orthodox theologians tried to define pure doctrine through the method of loci. This method joined together individual points of doctrine, showing how they were internally related. The second method of defining pure doctrine was analytical. Analysis is the way of explaining the whole through its individual parts.²¹⁷ Lutheran orthodoxy was determined to organize theology in a way that was systematized and understandable to everyone.

²¹⁴ Eric W. Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 113.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 109., see also Lull 49.

²¹⁶ Gonzalez, 240.

²¹⁷ Gritsch, 121.

When organizing thoughts and ideas, orthodox theologians looked to traditional resources, as well as new sources of authority. Given Luther's principle of *sola scriptura*, it was unavoidable that orthodox Lutheranism in the seventeenth century would devote a great deal of attention to the origin, inspiration, and authority of Scripture.²¹⁸ Scripture is clear and unambiguous, Orthodoxy taught, because it is the word of God, which is, rather than reflects, divine revelation; as such it is 'inspired by God.' That is why they claimed the Bible is the unquestionable authority for Christian thought and life.²¹⁹ Full fledged orthodox theology combines its biblical foundation with reflection on the Lutheran Confessions as the most attractive way of summarizing the truths of the Bible.²²⁰ Lutheran churches were viewed as orthodox when they subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions, and the full inspiration of Scripture.

Distinguishing itself from the strict Lutheranism of the sixteenth century, seventh century Orthodoxy left a place for philosophy in the task of theology.²²¹ Up to this point, philosophy was being carried on independently from theology,²²² as Luther had rejected Aristotle as a helpmate of theology.²²³ In the seventeenth century, Lutheran Orthodoxy began cautiously to incorporate Aristotle and other philosophers into its theology.²²⁴ There was also a push to

²¹⁸ Ibid., 238.

²¹⁹ Gritsch, 116.

²²⁰ Ibid., 114.

²²¹ Gonzalez, 240.

²²² Gonzalez, 226.

²²³ Gritsch, 115.

²²⁴ Ibid.

acknowledge natural law, grounded on the common reason imprinted by God in everyone.²²⁵

Looking to the Bible, Lutheran confessions and teachings, philosophy, and natural law, Lutheran Orthodoxy was very thorough and detailed. In Gonzalez's judgment, one shortcoming of Lutheran Orthodoxy is that it is almost exclusively marked as a religion of the mind.²²⁶ Their extremely literal interpretation of the Bible proved to be problematic as well, and Eric W. Gritsch²²⁷ writes that this way of understanding the Bible was the greatest pitfall of Lutheran Orthodoxy.²²⁸ Jodock remarks that the Orthodox view of Luther as a prophet of indisputable divine truth was also a difficulty. The dynamic quality of Luther's theology was sometimes obscured.

The following key theologians maintained the validity of angels, and how they give insight into a God-human relationship: David Hollaz, Abraham Calov, Martin Chemnitz, John Gerhard, John William Baier, and John Andrew Quenstedt. These theologians shared similar understandings in many regards to both Martin Luther and each other, but also slightly differed on certain aspects.²²⁹ By examining orthodoxy, one can see how begin to see how each of these theologians prioritized the God-human relationship. Therefore, these six case studies show how

²²⁵ Gonzalez, 240.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Eric W. Gritsch is the Emeritus Professor of Church History at the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg.

²²⁸ Ibid., 140.

²²⁹ Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, editors, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed., (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), 195. (For instance, they differ from one another in where to locate the topic of angels. Quenstedt and Hollaz place it the context of creation. Calov disagrees, and thinks that angels should be connected to the topic concerning the providence of God.)

appropriate and inappropriate conclusions can be drawn based on Luther's angelology. Chemnitz and Gerhard typically aligned with Luther's teachings of angels, Baier and Quenstedt attempted to fill in the missing pieces, and Hollaz and Calov went beyond what Luther said, slightly obscuring his understanding. There is a danger when one gets too wrapped up in what an angel is, rather than what their relationship is to God. After looking at a brief biography of each of these six orthodox theologians, one can see how their analyses relate to what Luther taught.

Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) is considered the great forerunner of Lutheran Orthodoxy.²³⁰ Robert Preus²³¹ refers to Chemnitz as the most important theologian, after Luther, in the history of the Lutheran church.²³² He set for himself the great task of reconciling the opposing factions within the Lutheran tradition.²³³ Chemnitz was determined to do his utmost to unite the Lutherans doctrinally, and achieved this impact mostly through writing.²³⁴ Chemnitz's writings had great influence on Lutheran theology, and the other orthodox theologians of his time.

²³⁰ Gonzalez, 227.

²³¹ Robert Preus is an influential teacher and prominent spokesperson to the conservative wing of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

²³² Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena*, Vol. 1 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 48.

²³³ Gonzalez, 228.

²³⁴ Preus, 47-48. (Chemnitz's most notable writings are a biblical exegesis titled *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, a systematic presentation of biblical theology titled *Loci Theologici*, a significant dogmatic work on the person of Christ titled *De Duabus Naturis*, and a meaningful interpretation of the message of the four gospels titled *Harmonia Quatuor Evangelistarum*. Dr. Darrell Jodock makes note that this title announces itself to be a "harmony" of the four gospels. That's an endeavor to iron out their differences and make one unified version of Jesus' life. The contrast between the methods of Lutheran Orthodoxy and the methods of contemporary biblical studies is evident.)

Compared to the other orthodox theologians, Chemnitz had much less to say about angels. He was unwilling to make conclusions where he did not have the authority to do so. He writes about the place for angels in the creation story, as he, in similar fashion to Luther, is careful not to draw conclusions that are uncertain.

As the Scriptures do not state the precise time and day of the creation of angels, we gladly remain in ignorance of that which we neither can nor ought to know. It is enough, therefore, for us to know (1) that the angels did not come into existence of their own accord, nor were begotten from the substance of God, but were created; (2) that the angels did not exist from eternity, nor indeed before that beginning when all things which are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, began to be.²³⁵

According to Chemnitz, the good angels perform functions that both pertain to their own happiness, and those that are ministerial and promote human salvation in service to God in Christ.²³⁶ Here, Chemnitz acknowledges the angel's intention to act in accordance to their own happiness, marking Chemnitz as unique among other orthodox theologians, including Luther himself, who usually characterize good angels as consistently selfless. Chemnitz's writing provides an understanding that is relatively consistent with Luther's teachings.

Preus adds that following Luther and Chemnitz, the Lutheran theologian generally considered to be the third most preeminent is John Gerhard (1582-1637).²³⁷ Gerhard authored many books in almost every theological field: exegesis, dogmatic theology, devotional literature, history, and polemics.²³⁸ His most celebrated work is *Loci Theologici*, which Gonzalez

²³⁵ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, I, 122, as quoted by Hay, 200.

²³⁶ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, as quoted by Hay, 211.

²³⁷ Preus, 52. (Gonzalez's claim is much bolder, as he refers to him without any doubt as the greatest theologian of Lutheran orthodoxy. Gonzalez, 229.)

²³⁸ Preus, 53.

considers to be the great systematic theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy,²³⁹ and Gritsch describes as the magnum opus of Lutheran Orthodoxy.²⁴⁰ Twenty three large quarto volumes long, *Loci Theologici* aspires to show the inner systematic connection of the entire body of theological knowledge.²⁴¹ If Gerhard is without any doubt the greatest theologian of Lutheran Orthodoxy, as Gonzalez claims, then Gerhard's opinion of angels matters to this conversation.

Gerhard also has little to add about angels. Gerhard did not specifically deny the presence of angels, but he did not give much attention to them. Gerhard more importantly wanted to emphasize the importance on Jesus the Son of God.

It is better to proclaim the wonderful philanthropy and mercy of the Son of God towards the fallen race of man, by which on our account and for our salvation He descended from heaven and became man, not taking on Him the nature of angels but the seed of Abraham, than to scrutinize beyond due limits the causes of that most just judgment, by which God delivered the angels who had fallen away from Him to be cast in chains of darkness into hell, to be reserved for judgment.²⁴²

In the *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Gerhard is not quoted more than on this occasion. He may have had a more thorough and defined understanding of angels, but it does not appear to be distinctive.²⁴³ Gerhard was a prominent Lutheran Orthodox theologian, and stayed within an appropriate limit of claims that Luther was willing to make. However, one

²³⁹ Gonzalez, 229.

²⁴⁰ Gritsch, 118.

²⁴¹ Gonzalez, 230.

²⁴² Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, IV, 34, as quoted by Hay, 215.

²⁴³ The editor writes, "My principal object in the notes was to present proof passages, but I also took occasion to observe in them the disagreements, usually of small account, between the authors quoted, and whatever was necessary to be said with regard to their methods of arrangements... I selected those passages which seemed to me most clear and precise, without regard to the question whether an earlier writer had similarly expressed himself on the same topic."

can see that Gerhard ran the risk of saying too little, thus not acknowledging a valid and helpful means in which angels provide insight into the God-human relationship.

An example of an Orthodox theologian who had something appropriate to add to Luther's understanding of angels is John William Baier (1647-1695). Baier was a professor at the University of Jena and later at Halle.²⁴⁴ He was somewhat affected by Pietism,²⁴⁵ and worked to show that Jena's brand of Lutheran theology was not syncretistic, as Calixtus was controversially claiming.²⁴⁶ Baier is known primarily for one book, his *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*.²⁴⁷ Critics of Baier's work, Preus discovers, say that his formulations are very scholastic and indicate a decline in the forcefulness of orthodox Lutheran dogmatics.²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, his writing was conveniently sized and clear, and was used in many schools in the 19th century.

Baier most notably writes about angels in the creation story. He is a Lutheran Orthodox theologian who "filled in the gaps" without overstepping appropriate bounds. He discusses the relation of angels to God, and our relation to them. According to Baier, angels could not have been created before the heavens and the earth, for these were created in the beginning, and they could not have been created after the six days of creation, because then God rested. Therefore, Baier concludes, they were created at some point within these six days, and probably before the creation of humans.²⁴⁹ He writes with colorful imagery on the relation angels have with God.

²⁴⁴ (This is the date usually selected for the beginning of Pietism.)

²⁴⁵ Preus, 64.

²⁴⁶ Gonzalez, 237.

²⁴⁷ Preus, 64.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.

²⁴⁹ Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 252, as quoted in Hay, 201.

After they had steadfastly exhibited to God their obedience in the state of probation, while other angels had fallen away, it pleased God to fill them with the light of glory, so that they were able clearly and intuitively to recognize God. But this vision of God was followed by a most intense love, by which the will of the angels cleaves to God in such a manner that it cannot be turned away from Him. And thus was effected their confirmation in the Good, or the determination of their will towards the Good; so that, whatsoever they do, they do with the reference to God as the infinitely perfect and perfectly known Good, without any blemish, without any defect.²⁵⁰

This relationship is evidenced by their appearance at key moments in scripture: the promulgation of the Mosaic Law, the announcement of the incarnation of Christ, the resistance to the introduction of idolatry in the church, etc.²⁵¹ Baier also says that it is probable that one angel is appointed for the protection of each godly person, and “that in extraordinary cases many angels are sent to the help of single individuals.”²⁵² Baier’s unique opinion is that it is the responsibility of humans to praise, love, and not offend angels because they favor and assist us greatly.²⁵³ Baier does, however, caution humans not to direct their prayers to the angels.²⁵⁴ Baier gives helpful additions for a Lutheran understanding of angels.

In addition to Baier, John Andrew Quenstedt (1617-1688) also added helpful insight to Luther’s angelology. In fact, the Lutheran orthodox theologian who had the most to say about angels was Quenstedt. Quenstedt spent his entire active ministry as professor at the University

²⁵⁰ Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 269, as quoted in Hay, 209.

²⁵¹ Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 276, as quoted in Hay, 212.

²⁵² Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 274, as quoted in Hay, 212.

²⁵³ Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 278, as quoted in Hay, 213.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

of Wittenburg.²⁵⁵ Gonzalez comments that although he was not an original thinker, his intellect and systematic ability allowed him to bring together the best of the Lutheran orthodox tradition in his *System of Theology*, published in 1683.²⁵⁶ Quenstedt was closely connected with other Lutheran theologians, as he was Gerhard's nephew, one of Calov's numerous fathers in law, and the son-in-law of another theologian, Johann Scharf.²⁵⁷ According to Robert D. Preus, Quenstedt's lifework is so extensive, so complete, so systematic, and so excellent, that no later Lutheran ever came close to equaling it.²⁵⁸ For the sake of a Lutheran orthodox understanding of angels, Quenstedt provides the most detailed information.

Along with Baier, Quenstedt makes appropriate additions to an understanding of angels, but does not teach about them in a way that is incongruent with Luther's teachings. He provides what the *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* cites as its definition of angels:

Angels are finite spirits, complete, intelligent, endowed with great power and originally created by God in righteousness and holiness, for the glory of God and the service of man; of whom some by their own free will fell from their Creator and from concreated perfection, and were consequently deprived not only of the favor and felicity which they had, but also of the beatific vision of God which they might have been able to enjoy, and were cast into internal fire for perpetual torment without any hope of pardon. The rest, however, continued in their original condition, and were so established by God in that which is good that they neither wish nor are able ever to lose it or fall away from it, and are enjoying God eternally.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Preus, 62.

²⁵⁶ Gonzalez, 232. (Gonzalez views this work as the systematic culmination of Lutheran orthodoxy.)

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Preus, 62.

²⁵⁹ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 455, as quoted in Hay, 199.

In opposition to the Anabaptists, who thought that angels were merely the actions of God, and against David George, who maintained that angels were the thoughts of the human mind,²⁶⁰ Quenstedt holds that the name “angel” does not describe the nature of the being, but its office, and signifies one sent, a legate, a messenger.²⁶¹ Quenstedt writes that angels are very intelligent,²⁶² powerful,²⁶³ indivisible,²⁶⁴ substantially everywhere,²⁶⁵ and were created and limited to a certain number that will never fluctuate²⁶⁶ for their endless duration.²⁶⁷ He writes much about the split of good and evil angels, and how the good angels are confirmed in truth so

²⁶⁰ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 444, as quoted in Hay, 202.

²⁶¹ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 442 as quoted in Hay, 200.

²⁶² Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 448, as quoted in Hay, 210. Quenstedt continues “As to the intellect of the angels, it shines no doubt with more illustrious radiance, since they have reached the goal and are enjoying the beatific vision of God, in which there is fullness of joy, and hence they are called angels of light, on account of the greater light knowledge.”

²⁶³ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 449, as quoted in Hay, 211. Quenstedt writes “The power of the good angels is very great. For though they were endowed with great strength at their creation, they have acquired still more, since they have been advanced in the state of glory, and by it are enabled to overcome the power of the devils. Hence they are called ‘those that excel in strength.’”

²⁶⁴ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 445 as quoted in Hay, 202. “The indivisibility of an angelic substance is owing to its incorporeity or immateriality, for what is not made of matter, is no quantity, nor has it parts outside of parts, and consequently is not divisible into quantitative parts.”

²⁶⁵ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 446 as quoted in Hay, 204. “For angels are in a certain space by designation, or definitively, i.e., their substantial, not merely visual, presence is limited in a certain space, so that they are there, and not in other spaces, and much less everywhere; and because an angel is devoid of parts, the whole angels is not only in the whole place, but the whole angels can exist in every part of the place, even the very least, yea, in a point.”

²⁶⁶ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 446, as quoted in Hay, 206.

²⁶⁷ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 446, as quoted in Hay, 203.

that they will never be able to fall from it.²⁶⁸ This resembles the ultimate form of freedom.²⁶⁹

Quenstedt also has much to say about evil angels.²⁷⁰ The Orthodox theologian with the most to say about angels was Quenstedt.²⁷¹

Quenstedt and Baier show appropriate ways to “fill in the gaps.” Baier gives helpful additions to what Luther had to say about the creation story, but does make conclusions that extend beyond Luther’s boundaries. Baier also writes about an angel’s relationship with God in a way that gives insight into a God-human relationship. Quenstedt describes a freedom of angels that comes from God once they were confirmed in the state of glory. This is helpful for humans to understand Luther’s teachings of law and gospel. If one submits to the will of God, they come to experience life. Quenstedt also provides a concise definition of angels, which Luther was unable to do. These are helpful and appropriate additions to an understanding of Luther’s angelology.

Abraham Calov (1612-1686) is considered by Robert Preus to be the most brilliant and influential theologian of the silver age of Lutheran orthodoxy.²⁷² Calling himself a “vigorous

²⁶⁸ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 447, as quoted in Hay, 208.

²⁶⁹ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 449, as quoted in Hay, 210-211. “This confirmation in their original state did not deprive the good angels of their freedom, nor did they cease for this reason to have a free will; but they rather attained in this way to greater freedom. Freedom from compulsion...freedom of choice...but the good angels do not have freedom as to contrary acts, but they are able to will and to do only good... Yea, the freedom, not to be able to sin, not to be able to retrain from doing good, is the very highest kind, which very highest grade of freedom God, the most free of all, enjoys.”

²⁷⁰ Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico- Polemica* (1685), I, 450-453, as quoted in Hay, 215.

²⁷¹ This claim is based on the fact that Quenstedt is referenced more than any other Orthodox theologian in the section on angels in Hay’s *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

athlete of Christ,”²⁷³ Calov was a strikingly effective teacher, and his reputation drew as many as 500 students to his classes.²⁷⁴ He possessed all the qualities of a churchman of his time: an encyclopedic memory, an indefatigable industry, linguistic skills, effective administration, and an inflexible zeal for what he thought was pure doctrine as the deposit of divine truth.²⁷⁵ Two of Calov’s most significant works are *Biblia Illustrata*, a gigantic commentary on the whole Bible, and his twelve-volume systematic work, titled *System of Theological Themes*. But where Calov was really at home was in the field of polemics. According to Preus, none of the orthodox Lutheran theologians have provoked such diverse reactions as Calov. In Calov, therefore, Lutheran Orthodoxy reached its high point, both in its best and in its worst features.²⁷⁶

Although Calov has less to say about angels than other orthodox theologians, the steps he takes usually go one too far. He writes that they are immortal, for they have no matter which is subject to change or decay; they are imperishable as to their duration, for their existence is not measured by time.²⁷⁷ Calov also established a beautiful understanding of the purpose of angels.

The purpose for which angels were created was, with respect to God, His praise and the execution of the divine will; with respect to themselves, the eternal enjoyment of God; with respect to man, service, for which they were specially and divinely destined, inasmuch as God created all things for man, and made the

²⁷² Preus, 59. (According to Preus, the silver age covers the time from the close of the Thirty Years’ War to the final decline of orthodoxy.)

²⁷³ Gritsch, 120.

²⁷⁴ Preus, 60.

²⁷⁵ Gritsch, 120.

²⁷⁶ Gonzalez, 231.

²⁷⁷ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum* (1655-77), IV, 24, as quoted in Hay, 204.

angels His servants at their very creation in order to use their ministry especially, for man and his salvation.²⁷⁸

Calov is also willing to describe angels as holy; after the fall of evil angels, those that remained in the state of glory are confirmed in the Good. They have the more perfect knowledge of God, which has resulted in a more perfect love of God, and thus a perfect holiness.²⁷⁹ Calov is the most bold of the orthodox theologians with this assertion, as he is committed to righteous reality of God's angels. Although this stance does not directly contradict Luther's teaches, it runs the risk of challenging the sole divinity of God, and therefore exceeds the limits Luther placed on angels. Calov's angelology can be understood as separate from God, which is not what Luther would have advised.

David Hollaz was usually considered the last theologian of Lutheran Orthodoxy.²⁸⁰ Hollaz was one of the few of the leading orthodox Lutherans who never taught but remained a pastor all his life.²⁸¹ Well versed in Lutheran Orthodoxy, Hollaz attempted a summary in his *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*,²⁸² called by Gritsch a masterpiece of arrangement and precision in fifteen hundred pages.²⁸³ No later dogmatics ever rivaled it in popularity.²⁸⁴ This

²⁷⁸ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum* (1655-77), IV, 23, as quoted in Hay, 204.

²⁷⁹ Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum* (1655-77), IV, 60, as quoted in Hay, 201.

²⁸⁰ Gonzalez, 232.

²⁸¹ Preus, 65.

²⁸² Gonzalez, 232.

²⁸³ Gritsch, 121.

²⁸⁴ Preus, 65.

was Hollaz's only literary work.²⁸⁵ Hollaz highly regarded the natural knowledge of God, and saw philosophy as necessary for the preparation of the soul to grasp subtler matters such as the trinity, or truth.²⁸⁶ Hollaz was a credible, caring pastor who incorporated the theology he preached for practical purposes.

Hollaz had much to say about angels, but like Calov, tended to make claims beyond what one can find in Scripture. He distinguished them from humans as complete, rather than incomplete spirits, and different from God because they are finite.²⁸⁷ He writes about many of their characteristics:

For the angels do not beget, nor are they begotten; they are neither increased nor diminished; they neither grow old, nor decay; nor do they proceed upon foot from one place to another. Yet they are not beyond the reach of every kind of change, for they vary the where of their presence, they rejoice, are sad, love, or hate; these are moral changes.²⁸⁸

According to Hollaz, angels are physically incorruptible because they do not consist of matter, but metaphysically corruptible because God has sole authority of absolute divine power.²⁸⁹ Angels are agile and quick in the absence of matter,²⁹⁰ and have the ability to speak with God, other angels, and humans.²⁹¹ Hollaz consistently writes that the angels are immortal only

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Lull, 68.

²⁸⁷ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 382, as quoted in Hay, 201.

²⁸⁸ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 382, as quoted in Hay, 203.

²⁸⁹ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 384, as quoted in Hay, 203.

²⁹⁰ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 384, as quoted in Hay, 204.

²⁹¹ Hollaz's *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 382, as quoted in Hay, 206.

through the grace of God.²⁹² Angels were created by God in a state of grace, where they are wise, holy, and on their way to eternal happiness, but after the fall of some angels, only the good angels continued in the state of glory.²⁹³ The angels which are evil can be traced back directly to this split, as they now seek to ruin the ecclesiastical, domestic, and politic estate.²⁹⁴ Hollaz also recognized the existence of a certain order among the good angels,²⁹⁵ which Luther was more hesitant to do. Hollaz's understanding of angels is direct, conclusive, and extensive.

Again, these are just a few of Hollaz's teachings, but one can see that even though some parts seem to come from Scripture, other parts seem to move beyond it. For example, Hollaz writes that angels are able to move human bodies, destroy them, assume bodies, join them, and guide them.²⁹⁶ One wonders how he knows as much as he claims. Although Hollaz appropriately compares angels to God, he offers a picture of angels that is taking one step too far in the eyes of Martin Luther. Baier also ran the risk of obscuring Luther's understanding of angels by associating and describing them with infinite language, such as perfect, holy, imperishable, etc. These words are helpful in comparison to human beings, but they must be understood in the context of, and not separate from, their relationship with God. Thus, these descriptions challenge the perfect, infinite being of God alone.

As one analyzes the teachings of Martin Luther, and how they compare to these case studies of Lutheran orthodox theologians, there certainly is much fluctuation. Luther provides

²⁹² Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 382, as quoted in Hay, 203.

²⁹³ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 384, as quoted in Hay, 207-208.

²⁹⁴ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 400, as quoted in Hay, 216.

²⁹⁵ Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 392, as quoted in Hay, 213.

²⁹⁶ Hollaz's *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), 382, as quoted in Hay, 206.

bits and pieces of a puzzle that not every orthodox theologian either acknowledged, or continued. Chemnitz and Gerhard typically aligned with Luther's teachings of angels, Baier and Quenstedt attempted to fill in the missing pieces, and Hollaz and Calov went beyond what Luther said, running the risk of obscuring his understanding by making claims beyond the parameters Luther sets in place. One can see that some faithfully represented Luther, and others included new ideas. The orthodox theologians concurred that angels are real, and involved with the world in which humans live today. Never once do these theologians deny their presence, or point to a time in which angels ceased to exist. Each of these orthodox theologians made sure to continue Luther's emphasis to stress that one must not mistake the sole divine authority of God, and therefore the topic of angels has to reflect that worldview.

Conclusion

What mattered more to Luther than anything else was the God-human relationship. Angels show humans how this relationship works. Thus an understanding of angels is helpful to understanding a relationship with God.

Through a contextual background of the writings where Luther devoted the most significant attention to the topic of angels, we can see that Luther verified the importance of an understanding of and knowledge about angels.²⁹⁷ He acknowledged the reality of the devil in order to understand the importance and necessity of the good angels. Luther writes, “The presence of the angels is an assured fact – a fact about which we should not have even one doubt. It is certain that they are not only waiting for our arrival in our future fatherland, but that they are actually abiding with us in this life, concerning themselves with and directing our affairs, if only we believe this with a firm faith.”²⁹⁸ He confirms their reality by providing references to an angel’s form, characteristics, and nature, also indicating where they are in the world. According to Luther, an angel can play a variety of roles in the world, serving as a guardian, governor, defender, comforter, friend, messenger, or glorifier. This shows the many ways angels manifest themselves to human beings, and Luther writes about the diverse reactions of humans in response to encountering an angel. Luther is clear that angels have limits, and their role in the world may have transitioned but not been eliminated with the appearance of Christ.

Classical orthodox theologians show the interesting effects of Luther’s scattered angelology. By combining Luther’s writings on angels with the Lutheran Orthodox theologians

²⁹⁷ Hoffman, *On the Angels*, 1. See footnote 69.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

who followed Luther's lead, one can assemble a more conclusive Lutheran understanding of angels. Some theologians aligned with Luther's teachings of angels, some attempted to fill in the missing pieces, and others went beyond what Luther said, slightly obscuring his understanding. There is a danger when one gets too wrapped up in what an angel is, rather than what their relationship is to God. By looking to Luther and the teachings of classical Orthodox theologians, one can find angels to be real and valid, providing insight into how God relates to humans, and how humans relate to God.

Luther's teachings of angels are indicative of what Luther teaches about God. It could be possible to seek to learn about angels separately from God, but that would not align with Luther's teachings. One of Luther's contributions is that he sees the roles of God illustrated through the workings of the angels. We can amplify our learning about God by seeing how angels relate to humans. For instance, human beings can begin to see a powerful God as protecting, defending, and governing, but in a relational, comforting, compassionate, loving way. This genuine relational quality of God can be understood through Luther's perception of angels.

One of Luther's key themes understands God to be active in the world. As pointed out in Chapter III, section c., Luther's teachings about angels portray them to be involved in the struggles of people, as comforters, companions, and defenders, working in a hidden way behind the scenes. Angels are thus not above things, or absent from the world. In this sense, angels can provide images of how God is working in the world. Jodock acknowledges that the very existence of bad angels indicates a kind of freedom God gives to creatures (evidenced in Chapter III, section a). What one learns about God active in the world is that God's activity never undermines or takes away the freedom of creatures. Angels are at work in such a way that their activity does not violate human freedom.

Jodock remarks that angels exemplify Luther's key understanding of the graciousness of God. The very presence of God can overwhelm a human being (as portrayed in Chapter III, section d). It is possible that angels as messengers of God are a sign of God's graciousness, for they are not so terribly overwhelming. If a messenger arrives that is not so awesome, majestic, or awe-inspiring as God, there may be a greater chance for the person to interact without being awestruck. Angels are a sign of God's respect for human beings and desire for communication. Terrence Fretheim, in his teachings about God in relationship, suggested that God is not the only one with something important to say, and that the prayers of human beings can affect the future.²⁹⁹ Angels depict a two-way street of communication humans have with God.

Luther's emphasis on the Gospel principle teaches that one was justified by grace through faith. Therefore, grace is an unmerited gift, and humans are *simul iustus et peccators*, simultaneously justified and a sinner. This indicates an act of God before an act of the believer, as evidenced in the Lutheran understanding of baptism. The same can be said of angels. God works through angels before one asks God to do so. While we can "pray for the eyes to see," as Shane Claiborne suggests, we can know all along that the presence of God through the angels precedes the human ability to comprehend or see them.

Addressing angels through Luther's view is a helpful way to understand the human's relationship with God. This understanding of angels, however, has the possibility to lean one of two obscuring ways. There is a danger of obscuring Luther's understanding of angels by saying too much about them, as seen in many contemporary images of angels, such as the angel trading cards or the movie titled, *Angels in the Outfield*. Luther warned against this on the celebration

²⁹⁹ Terrance Fretheim, "Implications of a God in Relationship" (public lecture, Gustavus Adolphus College, Saint Peter, MN, April 25th, 2009).

of St. Michael's Festival (as seen in Chapter I). Orthodox theologians David Hollaz and Abraham Calov took what Luther was willing to say one step too far (evidenced in Chapter IV). Luther shows that one should not take a step beyond what Scripture tells, for an invalid claim might be made that undermines the emphasis on God.

On the other hand, there is a danger of obscuring Luther's understanding of angels by saying too little. What if someone asks, "Could one not emphasize the protective functions of angels to the activities of God, and regard reference to angels to be a pictorial way to talk about God? Would there be any problem with a person today to hold that view?" Emanuel Hirsch, as seen in Chapter IV, reduced angels to nothing more than helpful thoughts. A potential problem by not paying enough attention to the possibility of angels can obscure the comforting activity and presence of God. Talking about angels reminds us of the relational presence of God. In Chapter IV, Gerhard runs the risk of obscuring an understanding of angels by saying too little. The challenge, but the necessary task at hand, is to articulate an understanding of angels without saying so much as to separate them from an understanding of the God-human relationship, but also not saying so little as to miss an insightful opportunity to see how God relates to human beings through the means of angels.

According to Martin Luther, angels are both a reality, and an expression of the God-human relationship. Relating to angels is a form of reassurance of the graciousness of God. Although there may seem to be confusion about a valid understanding of angels in the Lutheran church today, if we allow ourselves to connect Luther's scattered teachings on angels with those of a few noteworthy Lutheran Orthodox theologians, one can not only attain a more complete and sufficient Lutheran angelology, but also a more vivid understanding of the relational qualities of God.

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Wagner, David M. *The Angelology of Dr. Martin Luther*. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1982.

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Annotated Bibliography

Hay, Charles A. and Jacobs, Henry E. *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899.

This large book serves as a reference work for this project. From the perspective of the ELC, this encyclopedia is topically and alphabetically organized. What is unique about this source is its use of post Luther theologians. As I am researching the direction to go following what Luther himself said about angels, this book provides angel statements from leading Orthodox theologians such as Chemnitz, Gerhard, Quenstedt, Hollaz, and more. This book is helpful because it summarizes a common understanding, and follows with an extensive footnote collection that elaborates where each conclusion can be found. As I am learning which direction to lean for post-Luther angel theology, I think this reference book will provide a great amount of help.

Hoffman, Bengt R. *Luther and the Mystics: A Re-examination of Luther's Spiritual Experience and His Relationship to the Mystics*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976.

Bengt Hoffman has been a terrific aid to this thesis project, as he has provided the only English translation to what could be the most important sermon on angels, as well as this very intriguing and insightful book. As Hoffman looks at Luther's overall mystical experience, he writes about how his angelology fits into this larger picture. This source will serve as a significant source to my paper, because it also argues that Luther thought angels to be real, active, and alive in the world. This book is written from a scholarly interpretation, and also examines how angels fit into Luther's Christology. Hoffman provides insight into other theologian's interpretations of Luther's angelology, which will also help me in determining a direction with the conclusion of this paper, much like *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

Longman, Robert Jr., "Angels" Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: God's work.

Our hands., <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/Angels.aspx> [accessed March 6, 2009].

Serving as the web source for class requirements, the ELCA home page gives a description on its definition of angels. This source is especially interesting, because I can compare what the ELCA is presently teaching about angels to the masses back to what Luther said himself. I hope to by the end of my research find similarities and potentially differences between the current ELCA position and Luther's himself. In most cases, when compared to books found in the Gustavus library, the internet is looking to be of use for a wider audience. I will use this source at the beginning of the thesis to provide current statistics about angels. Many of the scholarly interpretations on Luther's angelology are not necessarily from the ELCA, so this is what makes this source integral to the purpose of the paper.

Lueker, Erwin L. *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954.

The *Lutheran Cyclopedia* is an example of a source that attempts to simplify and interpret a Lutheran understanding of angels. Coming from a Missouri Synod perspective, this book takes many concepts and ideas in Lutheran theology, and provides a description of them easy to understand. Therefore, this source is not referenced as a completely accurate and factual understanding. The source is effective in organizing Lutheran theology in a way that anyone can read and understand. My paper will want to address what the common people have understood angels to be in the Lutheran church, so this source will serve to infer that way of thinking. Compared to the other sources, this source is more straightforward and quick to conclusions, but less scholarly and thorough.

Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan et. al (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960-1970).

I have analyzed and scrutinized many volumes of *Luther's Works*. These volumes are the main source of my understanding of Luther's personal opinion and understanding of angels. Since these are Luther's direct words, I see these sources as relevant, accurate, and high quality as possible. The challenge to the interpreter is how to put the pieces together. Rarely does Luther write an extensive and concise argument on his opinion of angels. Therefore, the work is thus combining bits of information from these writings in order to develop a whole understanding. By searching the index, I have followed the leads into the portions of his works that mention angels the most. The volumes I have studied the most are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 32, and 53. I have chosen to focus on these volumes because they provide the most information on angels. Luther had a pastoral intention with the majority of his writings, and the audience is not just for the church leaders or intellectuals. These writings are intended for everyone. These works are most helpful when compared to the other works, because they are straight from the source being analyzed.

Luther, Martin, "On the Angels: A Sermon by Martin Luther of 1530." Trans. Bengt Hoffman (Gettysburg, PA: GAM, 1985).

Through an extensive search, I have found an English translation of Luther's "Sermon on the Angels". For many months, I have only been able to locate a German version, so this English translation brought joy to my project. Bengt Hoffman is also the author of *Luther and the Mystics*, which is another significant source to this thesis project. Since Luther rarely preached on angels specifically, this sermon is one of a kind. I have long thought this was the only sermon he ever preached on angels, but I have since found that there was another time when he gave a set of three sermons, which I still cannot find. For now, this sermon is an extremely critical translated primary source. The focus is on angels protection over specifically children, so it does not address all my questions. Finding this translation has been a success story in itself.

Marius, Richard. *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death*. Cambridge: The

Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Marius' book gives a description of the life of Luther, and an overview of his teachings and concepts. This resource will be used to correctly understand the setting of Luther's life, and how it influenced his angelology. It also may be used to find out who had a strong influence on Martin Luther, so that I may be able to read those authors interpretation of angels as well. This book will not be used to find a concise understanding of Luther's angelology, but moreso an understanding of the times immediately before and after Luther. Coming from an interesting perspective without a religious tendency, Marius is thorough and extensive in his understanding of Luther, which also may reveal how interpretations of Luther's teachings do or do not address the topic of angels. The audience seems to be for any educated person interested in Lutheran theology, and the life of Martin Luther.

Plass, Ewald M. "Angels." In *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 23-26. Vol. I. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

This three volume anthology contains 5,100 quotations on more than 200 subjects. I consider this an encyclopedia (reference work) to Lutheran studies. Out of Concordia Seminary, this Missouri Synod collection will be extremely helpful because it has a specific section on angels. It summarizes what an angel is, what the Bible says about angels, the difference between good and evil angels, the guardianship of good angels, angels participation in the state, and where angels are during the time of death. This source provides significant direction to when and where Luther said what he did about angels. Written through the ELCA perspective, my paper will have to analyze this Missouri Synod collection with a critical eye to the similarities and differences cross denominationally.

Soergel, Philip M. et. al "Luther on the angels", *Angels in the Modern World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006

This article has been the most helpful article that I have been able to find that actually looks to identify what Luther thought of angels. Many articles claim to know the "Lutheran understanding of angels", or "What Lutherans believe", but this article looks at what Martin Luther himself thought. This article is congruent with the mission of my research. It is well researched, and well structured. This author provides his findings, and thus his conclusions. It is very factual, and contains much information. I plan to use this as a significant resource in my studies. This article that analyzes Luther's interpretations of angels is unique, and therefore a substantial resource for information and opinion. The article tends to be sufficiently adequate at providing information in a way that is especially useful for my research. The thesis tends to argue that Luther's interpretation of angels has been divided in skepticism and enthusiasm, and therefore has left a divided legacy embedded with questions and nuance.

Wagner, David M. *The Angelology of Dr. Martin Luther*. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1982.

David Wagner writes this thesis paper for his masters of divinity degree. As a Missouri Synod Lutheran, Wagner looks to achieve what I am trying to do. Wagner looks straight to Luther's writings as his primary sources, but his use of other sources will also be important to me and my research. This paper is the one copy found in all libraries, and I am fortunate to have received it. In this project, Wagner will be walking with me as I sort out Luther's commentaries. This will certainly be one of the most helpful resources, but I will intentionally review his personal conclusions with a critical eye. His audience is broad, adapted to a feasible read for most educated peoples. This thesis paper, as well as the Philip Soergel article, are most likely the two most significant secondary sources.