

C. S. Lewis and Billy Graham on Angels

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INTRODUCTION: ANGELS IN AMERICA

When approaching any discussion of theology in the twentieth century, one has to keep in mind the long and unrelenting march of modernity that preceded it. From the rationalistic aspirations and empirical science of the Enlightenment, to the urbanization and mechanized uniformity of the industrial revolution, to the distractions and mediated enchantments of popular culture, for better or worse, theology in the past century has been inflected with these developments.

This has certainly been the case when it comes to angelology. At once marginalized and yet highly popular (at least outside the walls of academe), it has disappeared and reappeared, usually on the fringes of respectability. It is at one moment summarily dismissed as outdated superstition, and at another moment, it is embraced to the point of mystical indulgence. C. S. Lewis seemed to have captured this dichotomy best when he noted the sentiments towards demons in his own time: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall . . . One is to disbelieve in their existence. The

other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”¹

This contested division has not disappeared in the decades between Lewis and our own time, and it seems that any discussion of angels requires an almost embarrassed apologetic. There is now a sense of something almost vaguely heretical about discussing angels, which is not surprising given how much the subject has been appropriated by the New Spirituality movements.² The late literary critic Harold Bloom (1930-2019) was onto something when he wrote, back before the turn of the millennium:

After [the English poet William] Blake, the angels seemed to withdraw, except for a solitary visionary like the young Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism. There are angels aplenty in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and literature, but they tend to be isolated and idiosyncratic images of a lost spirituality. And yet they remain a mirror of spiritual aspiration, perhaps more a study of the nostalgias of belief than a manifestation of faith in their own splendor.³

This sense of angels being tied to a “lost spirituality” and equated with the “nostalgias of belief” certainly seems to be the case amongst mainstream liberal theologians in the age of Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) and his demythologizing electric lightbulbs. Yet Bloom goes on: “That there is a human longing for angels, perpetual and unappeasable on the part of many, is beyond denial. A desire for the consolations of a spiritual life transcends institutional, historical, and dogmatic structures, and belongs to human nature itself.”⁴ One has only to look at popular media (or your grandmother’s curiosity cabinet) to see that angels continue to have a vital and popular appeal.

Popular level books on angels and angelology has been a growing cottage industry for the past few decades. And while angels have been found making fleeting appearances on posters, Christmas cards, calendars and in occasional pop songs for years, they have also more recently become their own subgenre within movies, television shows, popular novels and even video games. Recently, the highest ranked show on Netflix was season five of *Lucifer*, a show where Satan takes on the role of detective and solves crimes.⁵ Not all of the depictions of angels and demons is lowbrow either. Tony Kushner’s award winning play *Angels in America* (1991), which drops angel lore into the AIDS epidemic of 1980s New York, is now regarded as canon for late twentieth-century American theater and literature. Angels

continue to thrive in the public square and there is a popular hunger for them, even if the diet, as C. S. Lewis would point out, is not always a healthy one.

While many theologians may have treated angelology as marginal, or dismissed it entirely, there were a few Christian popular level writers who attempted to address the subject. The two leading figures in this regard, at least from the evangelical perspective, were C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) and Billy Graham (1918-2018).

C. S. LEWIS ON ANGELS

C. S. Lewis, while not a declared evangelical himself, nor even a trained theologian or minister, has nonetheless held almost canonical status amongst evangelicals due to his public lectures and books. He was the most widely recognized Christian writer when he died in 1963 and his celebrity has only continued to grow ever since. Lewis never published a dedicated monograph on angels (excepting *The Screwtape Letters*, 1942, which is a fictional work on the life of demons), yet the subject permeates his works.

There are three key features of Lewis's angelology which develop across his writings. The first of these is his view of their nature and reality. For Lewis, angels are created, rational beings that exist in the universe.⁶ He writes: "Above humans in the natural order, some fell and became devils. They are either wholly spiritual or have bodies of a sort we cannot experience."⁷ Lewis indicates that they have also presented themselves within human history. He notes their appearance in biblical times, such as when they appeared at the annunciation of Christ.⁸ Yet for Lewis they have also made appearances more recently as well. Lewis was one of many well-known advocates for the angels of Mons, an episode from the battlefield of World War I, wherein it was claimed that British soldiers were rescued from a German attack in Belgium by the appearance of St. George and a battalion of angels. The German forces were all killed, and the German government, which alleged that the British had used poison gas on them, covered up the event. This at least was the story. The event never happened as it came from a short story called *The Bowmen*, written by the Welsh fabulist and "weird story" author Arthur Machen (1863-1947). The Bowmen first appeared in *The Evening News* on 29 September 1914, and many readers had confused it with an actual news report, including Lewis and G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936).⁹

At the same time that Lewis accepted the reality of angels, even if sometimes basing that belief on dubious sources, he understood that humans could only comprehend them symbolically. This explains the need for artistic depictions. He writes: “They are given wings . . . in order to suggest the swiftness of unimpeded intellectual energy. They are given human form because man is the only rational creature we know.” And he concludes that “[c]reatures higher in the natural order than ourselves, either incorporeal or animating bodies of a sort we cannot experience, must be represented symbolically if they are to be represented at all.”¹⁰ The question of symbolic representations of angels will be dealt more fully in the third point.

The second key element of Lewis’s angelology is that he draws his understanding of angels largely from medieval literature. In a lecture series, later published as *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, Lewis identifies two traditions regarding angels. The first, or the scholastic tradition, regarded angels as immaterial, but possessing the ability to be visible when needed. The second, or the Neoplatonic tradition, viewed angels as having corporeal bodies, but of a more refined matter, and as such, “they move, change size and shape, receive needed nourishment, suffer wounds and heal, have sensations, and make love.”¹¹ In a letter from 1940 he asserts that the scholastic view was the dominant view of the middle ages.¹² In *The Discarded Image*, however, he points out that by the early Renaissance, the older Neoplatonic view had become resurgent, as it was appealing to Florentine artists, who were interested in portraying the corporeality of angelic bodies in their art.

Lewis would find a number of other aspects of medieval angelology attractive, including their role as God’s servants, their ignorance of certain divine mysteries, terminology which identifies them as lesser “gods,” the notion that the angelic status is the final form of humanity, “the conflation of scriptural angels with the planetary intelligences of ancient Greek thought,” and the hierarchal arrangement of angels into nine “orders.”¹³ Lewis would make imaginative use of all of these aspects of angels, as presented in medieval theological literature, in his own fictional writings.

This last aspect of medieval angelology, their hierarchal ordering, was of particular fascination for Lewis. Having its origins in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius (5th-6th century AD), which in turn had its origins in the Neoplatonic “Great Chain of Being,” the hierarchy of angels first suggested to

Lewis “that God does nothing directly that can be done through an [angelic] intermediary” and second, that God’s splendor “comes to us filtered, as it were, through the [angelic] Hierarchies.”¹⁴ Lewis recognized the “dynamic” yet conventionally understood role of angels as God’s messengers, but he also notes that they possess an additional function, namely as a “lens” through which we can perceive God’s glory. He then goes on to note that it is the church’s role to emulate these angelic aspects. Or as he puts it: “the celestial Hierarchies are revealed to us in order that the Ecclesiastical hierarchy on earth may imitate, as nearly as possible, their divine service and office.”¹⁵ Lewis would find this angelic intermediary hierarchy and its quality of divine “lens” not only valuable for ecclesiology, but also for his fictional worlds.

This leads to the third key element of Lewis’s angelology, namely the role of literary and artistic depictions on shaping our understanding of angels. Lewis recognized that while the arts played a vital role in establishing a human conception of angels, he also notes that they played a significant role in the trivialization of angels, which he could see in his own time. He writes:

In the plastic arts these symbols have steadily degenerated. Fra Angelico’s angels carry in their face and gesture the peace and authority of heaven. Later came the chubby infantile nudes of Rafael; finally, the soft, slim, girlish, and consolatory angels of nineteenth century art, shapes so feminine that they avoid being voluptuous only by their total insipidity . . . In Scripture the visitation of an angel is always alarming; it has to begin by saying ‘fear not.’ The Victorian angel looks as if it were going to say, ‘there, there.’¹⁶

This diminishment of the angel is exacerbated, Lewis contends, by their cultural transition from plastic to literary arts. For in the literary form, the symbolic aspect becomes less apparent. “The literary symbols are more dangerous because they are not so easily recognized as symbolical.”¹⁷

According to Lewis, this disguising of the symbol makes these literary angels more convincing to readers, and allows the author to introduce novelties into the depictions of angels, which takes them further and further from orthodoxy. He notes that Dante was probably the best and most accurate at depicting angels and demons. “His devils, as Ruskin rightly remarked, in their rage, spite, and obscenity, are far more like what the reality must be than anything in Milton.”¹⁸ Milton, he also notes, through his use of high poetry, began to make angels

resemble Homeric heroes, with appropriate pathos. This is what leads to Milton's Satan being later described as a "tragic hero" and the "most Shakespearean of all literary characters after Shakespeare's own creations."¹⁹ Milton was followed by Goethe who, in his depiction of Mephistopheles in his epic play, *Faust* (Part 1, 1806; Part 2, 1831), turned the devil into a refined and civilized gentleman.

Lewis saw his own fictional writings as a corrective to this developing literary trend.²⁰ When it came to portraying the demonic, for example, his own efforts were to make demons and devils neither charming nor heroic, but depraved. This he tells us was the reasoning behind his depiction of hell as a bureaucracy in *The Screwtape Letters*. He writes of Screwtape: "Here again my symbol seemed to me useful. It ennobled me, by earthly parallels, to picture an official society held together entirely by fear and greed."²¹ He notes that this symbolic depiction allowed him to get rid of the ages old and romanticized fantasy that devils were in pursuit of something called 'evil.' Instead he shows there is a practicality and self-interest in demonic pursuits and actions.

Beyond this revised symbolism, Lewis does something else interesting as well. In his preface to *Screwtape* he notes that his readership was divided between those who will hold that his devils are "symbol and of a concrete reality," and those who will see them as "personifications of abstractions." He then reveals that his "purpose was not to speculate about diabolical life, but to throw light from a new angle on the life of man."²² In other words, he was creating a second order symbolism within his fiction. The bureaucratic *Screwtape* and *Wormwood* are symbolic depictions of a literal and spiritual demonic, but in addition, they are also acting as representations of human mental reasoning.

This second order symbolism occurs in another way in his science fiction *Space Trilogy* [*Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), *That Hideous Strength* (1945)] where some of the aliens are symbols of angels, which were themselves representations of intangible spiritual realities. Lewis makes it clear in a letter from 1958 that his fictional depictions in the *Space Trilogy* were based on what he actually believed about angels: "If the angels (who I believe to be real beings in an actual universe) have the relation to the Pagan gods that they are assumed to have in *Perelandra*, they might *really* manifest themselves in real form as they did to Ransom."²³

Lewis calls the angels in his fiction 'eldila,' and they are presented as spiritual beings who rule over the planets of Malacandra (Mars) and Perelandra (Venus). Lewis's depiction identifies them with an historically based theology

of angels. In a letter from 1957 he tells his correspondents about the two medieval views of angels he had previously written about in *The Discarded Image*, the Neoplatonic and the scholastic, and he “just took, for purposes of a story, the one that seemed most imaginable,” namely the Neoplatonic one, where “they had bodies of aether.” He defends his depiction of angels as material, declaring, “religiously, the question seems to me of no importance.” He then concludes: “And anyway, what do we mean by matter?”²⁴

Though dismissive in correspondence, Lewis is much more comprehensive in his description of the spiritual bodies of the *eldila* in *Out of the Silent Planet*. Though there is too much to unpack at this point, Lewis’s description is worth quoting in full:

Of course they have bodies. There are a great many bodies that you cannot see ... Body is movement ... If movement is faster, then that which moves is more nearly in two places at once ... But if movement is faster still ... faster and faster, in the end the moving thing would be in all places at once ... The swiftest thing that touches our senses is light, we only see slower things by it, so that for us light is on the edge—the last thing we know before things become too swift for us. But the body of an *eldil* is a movement swift as light; you may say its body is made of light, but not of that which is light for the *eldil*. His “light” is a swifter movement which for us is nothing at all: and what we call light is for him a thing like water, a visible thing, a thing he can touch and bathe in—even a dark thing when not illumined by the swifter. And what we call firm things—flesh and earth—seem to him thinner, and harder to see, than our light, and more like clouds and nearly nothing. To us the *eldil* is a thin half-real body that can go through walls and rocks: to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are as like a cloud.²⁵

This description of the *eldila* puts the character of Ransom in mind of Earth folklore of “bright, elusive people sometimes appearing on the Earth.”²⁶ For Lewis, the difference between spirit and matter is not one of kind, but of degree.²⁷

Along with bodies, the *eldila* are described as a kind of *hnau*, or rational being, and goodness is their “most magnificent characteristic.”²⁸ Most compelling, at least from a fictional point of view, is the form of the *eldila*. Intrinsic as their existence is, they can manifest themselves however they choose. They can appear as “darting pillars filled with eyes, lightning and pulsations of flame, talons and beaks and billowy masses of what suggest

snow.”²⁹ Or they appear as “rolling wheels . . . concentric wheels moving with a rotten, sickening slowness one inside the other,” or as thirty-foot-high human figures which burn “like white hot iron.”³⁰

Outside the *Screwtape Letters* and the *Space Trilogy*, Lewis’s one other major fictional depiction of angels occurs in *The Great Divorce* (1945). In this work they are presented in such guises as a voice coming out of a waterfall and a fantastical yet also pedestrian bus driver. Despite the strange attractiveness of these depictions, their own glory is not Lewis’s goal. As Janice Brown notes, in these books, “what is promoted in the reader is not a taste for further angel lore, but a feeling of awe towards the Absolute power, purity and beauty of God himself.”³¹ Lewis revels in the glory of angels, but he also respects their position in relation to the greater majesty of the divine Lord of all.

By providing this further metaphoric layer in his depiction of angels, Lewis is performing a highly imaginative rescue of the figure of the angel from its more recent literary and pictorial diminishment. If he had attempted to depict angels in a more conventional way, he would have been weighted down with a clichéd tradition of debased representations and assumptions, such as the heroic yet demonic figures of Milton and romanticism, or those weak, feminine Victorian angels he so despised. By presenting demons as governmental bureaucrats and angels as alien beings on other planets, he not only reinvigorated the image of the angel itself, making it closer to Christian orthodoxy, but he also made them fresh and interesting for contemporary readers.

BILLY GRAHAM ON ANGELS

While C. S. Lewis speculated on angels throughout his life and writings, Billy Graham’s consideration of the topic was far more limited and largely focused on a single work, his book *Angels* from 1975. This is not to say that this was the only place he discussed angels. He took up the topic in magazine articles and in several of his crusade sermons. Yet these presentations were largely drawn from the first edition of his book, or later incorporated into its second edition of 1985. As such, I shall here confine myself to what may be found in both editions of the book as they are more accessible.

Billy Graham’s *Angels* was somewhat uncharacteristic and unexpected. Virtually all of Graham’s prior books were on topics one would expect of the most celebrated evangelist of the twentieth century, such as on of coming to

faith, or living the Christian life. Other than soteriology, he had not produced another book on a specific doctrine. In his original preface to *Angels*, Graham notes that one of the things that compelled him to write the book was the fact that at the time, “there was nothing in print on the subject of angels.”³² If this indeed was the case, Graham certainly tapped into an unexpected vein of popular interest. When it was released, *Angels* sold one million copies in ninety days, making it the fastest selling book until that time. Including the expanded second edition of 1985, there have been forty-five different editions or versions of the book released so far. According to its current publisher, close to five million copies have sold to date, making it possible the best-selling book on angels in history.³³ Despite Graham’s claim that he was merely filling a gap in the book market, his reasons for writing it, as well as the reasons for its popularity are much more complex. Overall, there appears to be at least three major motivations for writing the book at the time that he did. Spelling these reasons out will give us insight into the nature of his approach.

The first reason has to do with not only the dearth of popular literature on angels, as was already mentioned, but the (perceived) massive growth of literature on the demonic. In the opening pages of *Angels*, Graham expresses alarm at what he sees as a growing interest in the diabolical. He notes that going into an airport, a newsstand or a university bookstore, “[you] will be confronted by shelves and tables packed with books about the devil, Satan worship and demon possession.”³⁴ This growing interest was not limited to books. He mentions the popularity of the films *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1973), which depicted Satan and demonic possession, and further declares that “as many as one in four hard-rock pop songs are devoted to or thematically make reference to the devil.”³⁵

Graham’s concern falls in line with the “satanic panic” of the 1970s and 1980s. Satanic panic was a term used to describe the public outcry over satanic or perceived satanic forms of popular culture, such as rock music and the role playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*.³⁶ The term “satanic panic” is often used pejoratively, but it does capture an aspect of Christian concern and culture at the time. For there had in fact emerged new public expressions of satanic interest and activity. The most notable example of this was the founding of the Church of Satan of San Francisco in 1966 by the circus impresario Anton LaVey (1930-1997). LaVey would go on to author the *Satanic Bible*

in 1969. While the church itself never attracted a very large membership, LaVey was a master of public performance and staging rituals such as black masses, satanic weddings and satanic baptisms he found to be an ideal way of gaining the attention of a curious and sensation-hungry media. As such, the Church of Satan garnered a much larger popular presence than its actual size merited.³⁷ Graham does not mention the Church of Satan directly, and he recognizes that much of the deluge of books coming out were not all examples of satanic thought and religion per se, but were often examples of general curiosity and even attempts at warning, such as his own. The Exorcist film, for example, did not condone Satanism. If anything, it led to a revival of interest in Christian exorcism. After his initial statements of alarm in *Angels*, he would later concede that “[e]ven in the Christian world the presses have turned out a rash of books on the devil.” He even acknowledges, “I myself have thought about writing a book on the devil and his demons.”³⁸

Graham also recognized that the interest in Satanism was tied to other occult interests and phenomena then emerging in the culture. He notes in passing the ancient aliens theory of *Chariots of the Gods* (1968) by Erich von Däniken, and the rise of interest in ESP. On the topic of UFOS, he remarks that some Christian authors had speculated that such sightings were in fact “God’s angelic host.”³⁹ Whether he thought so as well, he does not say. One belief of his that he did tie to these emerging occultist trends were his beliefs regarding the millennium. He writes: “The apparent increase in satanic activity against people on the planet today may indicate that the second coming of Jesus Christ may be close at hand.”⁴⁰ Since the late 1940s Graham had insisted the second coming of Christ was being heralded by the rise of Communism and the Cold War; by the mid-1970s there is a shift in his warnings to the herald of the millennium being the inner turmoil of American society as it looked to new spiritualities.⁴¹

The second reason Graham wrote on angels was to provide a correction to cultural neglect and misconceptions. Following from the first, he notes that we have not only given attention to the devil and his demons to the point of “worshipping” them, but we have also ignored the “good angels.”⁴² Graham argues that angels are real, created beings who “belong to a uniquely different dimension of creation that we . . . can scarcely comprehend” and he knows that they exist because “the Bible says there are angels” and he has “sensed their presence in his life.”⁴³ He also notes that

the “history of virtually all nations and cultures reveals at least some belief in angelic beings” and that “theologians through the ages have universally agreed about the importance of angel-ology.”⁴⁴ That our own contemporary culture appears to dismiss them indicates how much out of step we are with the rest of humanity and history. He further notes, however, without any reference, that “some hard-nosed scientists lend credence to the scientific probability of angels when they admit the likelihood of unseen and invisible intelligence.”⁴⁵

Graham’s corrective of popular misconceptions on angels also crosses over into issues of gender and in particular, masculinity. It is certainly not a point of contention that much of the modern American imagery of angels came out of the Victorian era, and this imagery was largely feminine, as Lewis himself has already indicated. Graham is intent to dispel this feminine image. While he acknowledges that angels were officially sexless, and had no material bodies, his own metaphorical language tended towards the masculine and martial.⁴⁶ Angels are described as “mighty,” that they “wage war” and they were “better organized than were the armies of Alexander the Great, Napoleon, or Eisenhower.”⁴⁷ Several of his anecdotal narratives involve angels appearing in intimidating masculine guise. In one account he relates, missionaries in the New Hebrides were protected by angels that appeared as “hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands.” In another, an Iranian colporteur selling Bibles appears to his enemies to be “always surrounded by soldiers.”⁴⁸ Graham makes it clear that angels are not to be thought of as “effeminate weirdos.”⁴⁹

In its first imprints the subtitle of Graham’s book was “God’s Secret Agents.” This was an apt image for the height of the Cold War, and one which suggested stealth, risk, and perhaps some discreet brutality, which was appropriate for some of the narratives he related. For the second edition of 1985, the subtitle was changed to “Ringing Assurance that We Are Not Alone.” The edgier and pulpier image is abandoned for something more ambiguous and comforting. This also indicates that he may have thought there was a need to tone down the more assertive and aggressive masculine aspects.⁵⁰

The third reason Graham claimed to want to write a book on angels was to demonstrate their biblical pedigree and their contemporary value. While he does occasionally touch on historical theological approaches to angels, such as recounting Pseudo-Dionysus’s hierarchy, or literary depictions,

these take up a relatively small amount of space in his text. Graham more typically presents biblical depictions of angels (usually grouped thematically into chapters, such as “angels as messengers,” “angels in the gospels,” “angels in the ministry of Christ,” “angels in prophecy,” etc.) and then provides commentary. These biblical depictions are often augmented with contemporary real world accounts of angels, sometimes these accounts being autobiographical in nature. An example of this is occurs in the chapter, “Angels Protect and Deliver Us.” Graham opens this chapter by explaining 2 Kings 6:14-17, which recounts the prophet Elisha being protected from the Syrian army at Dothan by an army of angels, and Acts 27:23-25, where the apostle Paul tells his fellow survivors of a shipwreck that an angel reassured him of their safety. From this Graham briefly considers the possibility of a guardian angel being assigned to every Christian at birth, based on Matthew 18:10. He then goes no further than this in terms of biblical exposition and exegesis, but then follows this up with two more contemporary illustrative stories. The first story is one that he heard from his father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell (1894-1973) about an angelic visitation in China, and the second is one that he heard from Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983), which was about her experiences in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. In this second narrative, Graham recounts how ten Boom hid a Bible under her clothing during inspection time, and it was not noticed by the prison guards due to what she felt was the presence of angels.⁵¹ From this Graham concludes that Christians should be “encouraged and strengthened! Angels are watching; they mark our path.”⁵² This is followed by additional examples from the Bible and contemporary narratives. By interweaving both kinds of narratives, Graham is both grounding his assessment of angels in Scripture, and suggesting contemporary relevance.

At this point two general observations can be made with regards Graham’s work on angels, before drawing broader comparisons his angelology and that of Lewis’s. While Graham firmly grounded his angelology in Scripture, his use of contemporary stories, though illustrative, can sometimes seem unrelated or tenuous at best. In a narrative from early in the book he recounts the story of how a Chinese woman and her child were attacked by a tiger. This was the narrative related by L. Nelson Bell. The woman called out for Jesus to protect her, and the tiger ran away. It is Graham himself who inserts the suggestion of angelic visitation by asking: “[h]ad God sent an angel to help this poor

ignorant Chinese woman?”⁵³ Sometimes the point of the narrative is not even clear in terms of its relation to the theological point under discussion. In the chapter on “Angels as Messengers” he recounts a private conversation he had with then Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Kissinger told Graham about some of the problems facing the world, and Graham told Kissinger “he believed the world was experiencing an unseen spiritual war.”⁵⁴ What Kissinger thought or said in reply is not recounted, and the narrative ends without explanation as to how it related to the theme of angelic messengers. Graham’s narratives seldom build to a coherent or developed theological point, and they are sometimes illustrative and sometimes not. Nevertheless, the stories on their own are compelling in their own right, in terms of their connection to exotic locations (China, remote missionary outposts) or famous persons (Corrie ten Boom, Henry Kissinger).

The second general observation has to do with what appears to be one of Graham’s key impulses to write on angels, namely as a counter to what he sees as the wider cultural interest in Satan and the demonic. This includes not only those who would explicitly embrace Satanism, but also those who might find a distant fascination with it. He writes: “[w]e must not get so busy counting demons that we forget the holy angels.” He adds, sounding reminiscent of the angels of Mons story: “If your valley is full of foes, raise your sights to the hills and see the holy angels of God arrayed for battle on your behalf.”⁵⁵

Yet one has to ask, is the best way to counter Satan and the demonic to turn towards the angels? Graham indicates that the angels are not the only or even the primary means of countering the demonic. He does relate that “we are to rely on the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us” and only then in “addition we can count on the powerful presence of angels.”⁵⁶ Further to this, he repeats Saint Paul’s warning: “We are not to pray to angels. Nor are we to engage in ‘a voluntary humility and worshipping’ of them. Only the Triune God is to be the object of our worship and our prayers.”⁵⁷ He even ends the book, as one would expect from Billy Graham, with a petition for the reader to make a decision for Christ. Graham certainly finds angels and their power entrancing, and his readers no doubt share in this fascination, but like Lewis, he stops short of taking them as a substitute for the God of Scripture.

C. S. LEWIS AND BILLY GRAHAM: AN ASSESSMENT

Due to their influential status amongst evangelicals in the second half of the twentieth century and up to the present, the views of Lewis and Graham would hold enormous popular sway on any theological topic. That they had bestselling books (which continue to sell) on a marginal topic such as angels and demons, does attest to that status, but it also shows their ability to sense wider public curiosity. Beyond this intuitiveness, are there any other general points that can be taken away regarding both Lewis and Graham and the subject of angels?

First, Lewis and Graham had as one of their main goals to draw readers back to a more biblically faithful and orthodox view of angels. Graham works directly from the pertinent biblical passages on angels, while Lewis tends to draw from later theologians who have more developed and speculative theologies.

Both also present their views as orthodox responses to inappropriate or insufficient representations that they find in the wider culture. Graham is more explicit in this aspect as he sees himself working against a growing popular interest in the antithesis to the angelic, namely the demonic. Lewis on the other hand seeks to rekindle a wider public interest by imaginatively reworking their literary and artistic depiction, which had become tired and banal. Both Lewis and Graham attempted to impress upon their audiences a sense of their awe and power. Lewis does the better job by developing a more nuanced and imaginative depiction of that power, showing how angels and demons support and attack us morally and psychologically. Graham tends more often to invoke masculine tropes of weapons and warfare, or showing angels at work in situations of physical precariousness, but they are usually brief or suggestive depictions.

Finally, for all their effort towards achieving a restoration of the image of the angel, there remains the lingering concern of giving them too much attention. Both Lewis and Graham recognize that while they are providing a corrective in terms of our understanding of angels, they realize that angels are not comparable to the majesty and power of the God that they serve. This is the point of their writing to be most considered in our increasingly angel-saturated religious culture. Harold Bloom, whose outsider stance has previously provided some insight into this matter, has articulated well the situation now posed to orthodox Christians. Though he means it as an

affirmation of what he called the “American Religion,” we can perhaps take it more as a sobering warning:

There is ... an ancient tradition of enmity between the fallen angels and Adam, and an even more archaic rivalry between good angels and the first man. Saint Paul may be the figure in whom all the tensions between angels and humans came together. Like Augustine after him, Paul is so central to Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, that the current prevalence of angel worship among us is an even more extraordinary phenomenon than initially it may seem to be. We forget the Pauline admonitions because, slowly but massively, an American angelology is developing among us, and not just among the Mormons, and the Pentecostals, and New Age networks, but among Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, Jews, and across the religious spectrum ... For us, they become images of our freedom: from the past, from authority, from the necessity of dying. And for many among us, I suspect, the angels are well-nigh independent of God.⁵⁸

For Lewis and Graham such independence would not be up for consideration. The question is whether this is also the case for their current and ever growing readership.

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1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Harper One, 1942, 1996), ix.
 2. This attitude is changing somewhat, given more recent scholarly explorations of the topic. See for example: Shandon L. Guthrie, *Gods of this World: A Philosophical Discussion and Defense of Christian Demonology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018); Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), *Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God's Heavenly Host* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).
 3. Harold Bloom, *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 40.
 4. *Ibid.*, 40-41.
 5. Television shows on angels and demons have recently become so popular that they now constitute a distinct genre. A partial list of show titles includes: *Supernatural* (2005-), *Dominion* (2014), *Lucifer* (2015-), *Damien* (2016), *The Messengers* (2015), *Reaper* (2007-2009), *Sleepy Hollow* (2013-2017), *Shadowhunters* (2016-2019), *Constantine* (2015), *Penny Dreadful* (2014 -2016), *Preacher* (2016-2019), *Midnight, Texas* (2017-2018), *Good Omens* (2019), and *The Fallen* (2006).
 6. C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Hook, 29 December 1958, in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950-1963* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007) 1004-1005.
 7. Quoted in Charles A. Huttar, “Angels,” in *The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia*, eds. Jeffrey D. Schiltz and John G. West (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1998), 79.
 8. Colin Duriez, *The C. S. Lewis Encyclopedia* (Wheaton, IL, Inspirational Press, 2000), 18.
 9. For Lewis on the angels of Mons, see C. S. Lewis, “Miracles,” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI,

- Eerdmans, 1970), 27-28. For a full recounting of the angels of Mons episode and its aftermath, see Richard J. Bleiler, *The Strange Case of "The Angels of Mons": Arthur Machen's World War I Story, the Insistent Believers, and His Refutations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2015). The Bowmen has been republished. See Arthur Machen, *The White People and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York, Penguin Books, 2011).
10. C. S. Lewis, "Preface," in *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1961).
 11. Huttar, "Angels," 79.
 12. C. S. Lewis to Sister Penelope CSMV (BOD), 24 October 1940, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume II: Books, Broadcasts, and the War 1931-1949* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004) 450.
 13. Huttar, "Angels," 79.
 14. For an assessment of the substantial C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 73.
 15. For a comprehensive survey of the influence of the Great Chain of Being, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 74.
 16. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 4.
 17. Ibid.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 1957), 206; Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), 158.
 20. Lewis's friend and fellow "Inkling," Charles Williams (1886-1945), also produced a number of fictional accounts of angels. See especially his *War in Heaven* (1930) and *The Place of the Lion* (1931).
 21. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 5.
 22. Ibid., 7.
 23. C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Hook, 29 December 1958, 1005.
 24. C. S. Lewis to Anne and Martin Kilmer, 7 August 1957, in *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume III*, 873.
 25. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 94-95.
 26. Ibid., 95.
 27. Terry Eagleton, in his insightful history of materialism, notes that distinction between spirit and matter have not always been so clear, even within the "orthodox" Christian tradition. See *Materialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 23-26, 46-47.
 28. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 79; Janice Brown, "C. S. Lewis and the Truth about Angels," *The Journal of Inklings Studies* 3, no. 2 (December 2017): 104.
 29. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 197.
 30. Ibid., 198-199.
 31. Brown, "C. S. Lewis and the Truth about Angels," 106.
 32. Billy Graham, *Angels: Ringing Assurance that We Are Not Alone* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975, 1995), xi.
 33. *Angels* had originally been published by Doubleday, but was later picked up by Thomas Nelson. Currently it is being printed by Harper Collins. The following is a response from Harper Collins regarding the current sales figures: "Since the original release was on Doubleday in 1975, we don't have access to that early sales information. However, once we started selling the book, we sold an additional 2 million units, outside of what Doubleday had sold. And in the last 25 years, we've released 45 different versions of the book. In early 1995, we had placed a banner on the front of that year's PB release, stating "Over 3 Million sold." Since that time, specifically, we've sold 1.5 Million copies. So, I think it's safe to say that the book has sold close to 5 million copies and has been released in over 50 different SKUs." (Private correspondence related to author, 12 September 2020).
 34. Graham, *Angels*, 10. Graham may have been right about the lack of books on angels at the time of *Angels* first publication, but the ensuing years would see an explosion of literature on the subject, especially by women authors. For a history of this movement, see Peter Gardella's popular culture history of angels in America, *American Angels: Useful Spirits in the Material World* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 2007). See especially pp. 93-131.
 35. Graham, *Angels*, 11.
 36. For a good sociological assessment of Satanism and youth culture in this time period, see Joseph P. Laycock, *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).
 37. For more on the life and cultural influence of LaVey, see Gareth J. Medway, *The Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) and Ruben Van Luijk, *Children*

- of *Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 305-358. For a very recent study of the successor to the Church of Satan, the Satanic Temple, and contemporary Satanism, see Joseph P. Laycock, *Speak of the Devil: How the Satanic Temple is Changing the Way We Talk about Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
38. Graham, *Angels*, 11.
 39. *Ibid.*, 13. This linking of angels and demons to UFOs and ESP may seem eclectic, but Graham was prescient, as many later historians of the occult have also found strong historic links between these subjects. See Colin Wilson, *The Occult: The Ultimate Guide to Those Who Would Walk with the Gods* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2015); Mitch Horowitz, *Occult America: White House Séances, Ouija Circles, Masons, and the Mystic History of Our Nation* (London: Bantam Press, 2010).
 40. Graham, *Angels*, 11.
 41. Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard University Press, 2014), 231-234.
 42. Graham, *Angels*, 29.
 43. *Ibid.*, 30, 20.
 44. *Ibid.*, 35, 29.
 45. *Ibid.*, 36.
 46. For further discussion on Graham's place in the history of American masculinity, see Seth Dowland, "Billy Graham's Evangelical Manhood," in *Billy Graham: American Pilgrim* (eds. Andrew Finstuen, Anne Blue Wills & Grant Wacker; New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 216-231.
 47. Graham, *Angels*, 33.
 48. *Ibid.*, 8.
 49. *Ibid.*, 31.
 50. Seth Dowland notes a distinct "softening" in Graham's tone and public persona, starting in the 1970s and 1980s, which he sees as Graham's flexible response to changing attitudes towards masculinity in the culture at large. See Dowland, "Billy Graham's Evangelical Manhood," 225-230.
 51. Graham, *Angels*, 139-141.
 52. *Ibid.*, 141.
 53. *Ibid.*, 6.
 54. *Ibid.*, 118.
 55. *Ibid.*, 254.
 56. *Ibid.*, 253.
 57. *Ibid.*, 47.
 58. Bloom, *Omens of Millennium*, 76-77.