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SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

**BASIC WRITINGS OF SAINT  
THOMAS AQUINAS**

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## TREATISE ON THE ANGELS

### Question I

#### THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ANGELS ABSOLUTELY CONSIDERED

(In Five Articles)

NEXT we consider the distinction of corporeal and spiritual creatures: first, the purely spiritual creature which in Holy Scripture is called *angel*; secondly, the creature which is wholly corporeal;<sup>1</sup> thirdly, the composite creature, corporeal and spiritual, which is man.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning the angels, we consider first what belongs to their substance; secondly, what belongs to their intellect;<sup>3</sup> thirdly, what belongs to their will;<sup>4</sup> fourthly, what belongs to their creation.<sup>5</sup>

Their substance we consider absolutely, and also in relation to corporeal things.<sup>6</sup>

Concerning their substance, absolutely considered, there are five points of inquiry: (1) Whether there is any creature entirely spiritual and altogether incorporeal? (2) Supposing that an angel is such, we ask whether he is composed of matter and form? (3) We ask concerning their number. (4) Their difference from each other. (5) Their immortality or incorruptibility.

#### First Article

##### WHETHER AN ANGEL IS ALTOGETHER INCORPOREAL?

*We proceed thus to the First Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that an angel is not entirely incorporeal. For what is incorporeal only in relation to us, and not in relation to God, is not absolutely incorporeal. But Damascene says that *an angel is said to be incorporeal and immaterial as regards us; but compared to God he is corporeal and material.*<sup>7</sup> Therefore he is not absolutely incorporeal.

*Obj. 2.* Further, nothing is moved except a body, as the Philosopher says.<sup>8</sup> But Damascene says that *an angel is an ever movable intellectual substance.*<sup>9</sup> Therefore an angel is a corporeal substance.

*Obj. 3.* Further, Ambrose says: *Every creature is limited within its own*

<sup>1</sup> Q. 65.  
II, 3 (PG 94, 866)

<sup>2</sup> Q. 54.  
Aristotle, *Phys.*, VI, 4 (234b 10).

<sup>4</sup> Q. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Q. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Q. 51.

<sup>7</sup> *De Fide Orth.*,

II, 3 (PG 94, 866).

<sup>9</sup> *De Fide Orth.*, II, 3 (PG

*nature*.<sup>10</sup> But to be limited belongs to bodies. Therefore, every creature is corporeal. Now angels are God's creatures, as appears from *Ps. cxlviii. 2: Praise ye the Lord, all His angels*; and, farther on (*verse 4*), *For He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created*. Therefore angels are corporeal.

*On the contrary*, It is said (*Ps. ciii. 4*): *Who makes His angels spirits*.

*I answer that*, There must be some incorporeal creatures. For what is principally intended by God in creatures is good, and this consists in assimilation to God Himself. Now the perfect assimilation of an effect to a cause is accomplished when the effect imitates the cause according to that whereby the cause produces the effect; as heat makes heat. Now God produces the creature by His intellect and will.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the perfection of the universe requires that there should be intellectual creatures. Now to understand cannot be the action of a body, nor of any corporeal power; for every body is limited to *here* and *now*. Hence the perfection of the universe requires the existence of an incorporeal creature.

The ancients, however, not properly realizing the meaning of understanding, and failing to make a proper distinction between sense and intellect, thought that nothing existed in the world but what could be apprehended by sense and imagination.<sup>12</sup> And because bodies alone fall under imagination, they supposed that *no being existed except bodies*, as the Philosopher observes.<sup>13</sup> Thence came the error of the Sadducees, who said that there was no spirit (*Acts xxiii. 8*).

But the very fact that intellect is above sense is a reasonable proof that there are some incorporeal realities comprehensible by the intellect alone.

*Reply Obj. 1.* Incorporeal substances rank between God and corporeal creatures. Now the medium compared to one extreme appears to be the other extreme, as what is tepid compared to heat seems to be cold; and thus it is said that the angels, compared to God, are material and corporeal, not, however, as if anything corporeal existed in them.

*Reply Obj. 2.* Motion is there taken in the sense in which to understand and to will are called motions. Therefore an angel is called an ever mobile substance, because he is always actually intelligent, and not as if he were sometimes actually and sometimes potentially, as we are. Hence it is clear that the objection rests on an equivocation.

*Reply Obj. 3.* To be circumscribed by local limits belongs only to bodies; whereas to be circumscribed by essential limits belongs to all creatures, both corporeal and spiritual. Hence Ambrose says that *although some things are not contained in corporeal place, still they are none the less circumscribed by their substance*.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *De Spir. Sancto*, I, 7 (PL 16, 753). <sup>11</sup> Q. 14, a. 8; q. 19, a. 4. <sup>12</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De An.*, III, 3 (427a 21). <sup>13</sup> *Phys.* IV, 6 (213a 29). <sup>14</sup> *De Spir. Sancto*, I, 7 (PL 16, 753).

## Second Article

WHETHER AN ANGEL IS COMPOSED OF MATTER AND FORM?

*We proceed thus to the Second Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that an angel is composed of matter and form. For everything which is contained under any genus is composed of the genus and of the difference which, added to the genus, makes the species. But the genus is taken from the matter, and the difference from the form.<sup>15</sup> Therefore everything which is in a genus is composed of matter and form. But an angel is in the genus of substance. Therefore he is composed of matter and form.<sup>16</sup>

*Obj. 2.* Further, wherever the properties of matter exist, there matter is.<sup>17</sup> Now the properties of matter are to receive and to stand;<sup>18</sup> whence Boethius says that *a simple form cannot be a subject*. Now the above properties are found in the angel. Therefore an angel is composed of matter and form.<sup>19</sup>

*Obj. 3.* Further, form is act. So what is only form is pure act. But an angel is not pure act, for this belongs to God alone. Therefore an angel is not only form, but has a form in matter.<sup>20</sup>

*Obj. 4.* Further, form is properly limited and made finite by matter. So the form which is not in matter is an infinite form. But the form of an angel is not infinite, for every creature is finite. Therefore the form of an angel is in matter.<sup>21</sup>

*On the contrary*, Dionysius says: *The first creatures are understood to be not only immaterial but also incorporeal.*<sup>22</sup>

*I answer that*, Some<sup>23</sup> assert that the angels are composed of matter and form, which opinion Avicbron endeavored to establish in his book, the *Fount of Life*. For he supposes that whatever things are distinguished by the intellect are also distinct in reality.<sup>24</sup> Now as regards incorporeal substance, the intellect apprehends something which distinguishes it from corporeal substance, and also something which it has in common with it. Hence Avicbron concludes that what distinguishes incorporeal from corporeal sub-

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Metaph.*, VII, 2 (1043a 19).—Cf. Boethius, *De Divisione* (PL 64, 879); Avicenna, *Metaph.*, V, 6 (90rb). <sup>16</sup> Argument of Alex. of Hales, *Summa Theol.*, II, I, no. 106 (II, 135); and of St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. iii, a. 1, q. 1 (II, 90).—Cf. Avicbron, *Fons Vitae*, III, 18 (p. 118). <sup>17</sup> Cf. Avicbron, *Fons Vitae*, IV, 10 (pp. 231-232). <sup>18</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, IV, 10 (p. 232); I, 11 (p. 15).—Cf. also St. Albert, *In II Sent.*, d. 1, a. 4 (XXVII, 13). <sup>19</sup> *De Trin.*, II (PL 64, 1250).—Cf. St. Albert, *In II Sent.*, d. iii, a. 4 (XXVII, 66); St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. iii, a. 1, q. 1 (II, 90). <sup>20</sup> Argument of St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. iii, a. 1, q. 1 (II, 91). <sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*—Cf. also St. Albert, *Summa de Creatur.*, II, q. 7, a. 3 (XXXV, 101); Dominic Gundissalinus, *De An.*, VII (p. 56); Avicbron, *Fons Vitae*, IV, 6 (pp. 223-224). <sup>22</sup> *De Div. Nom.*, IV, 1 (PG 3, 693). <sup>23</sup> Alex. of Hales and St. Bonaventure especially.—Cf. E. Kleineidam, *Das Problem* (pp. 23-46). <sup>24</sup> *Fons Vitae*, II, 16 (p. 51); III, 46 (p. 182).

stance is to it as a *form*, and whatever is subject to this distinguishing form, being as it were something common, is its *matter*.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, he asserts, the universal matter of spiritual and corporeal things is the same;<sup>26</sup> from which we are to understand that the form of incorporeal substance is impressed on the matter of spiritual realities, in the same way as the form of quantity is impressed on the matter of corporeal things.<sup>27</sup>

But one glance is enough to show that there cannot be one matter in spiritual and in corporeal things. For it is not possible that a spiritual and a corporeal form should be received into the same part of matter, or otherwise one and the same thing would be corporeal and spiritual. Hence we are left with the alternative that one part of matter receives the corporeal form, and another receives the spiritual form. Matter, however, is not divisible into parts except as regarded under quantity; for without quantity substance is indivisible, as Aristotle says.<sup>28</sup> It would therefore follow that the matter of spiritual beings is subject to quantity; which cannot be. Therefore, it is impossible that corporeal and spiritual beings should have the same matter.

It is, further, impossible for an intellectual substance to have any kind of matter. For the operation belonging to anything is according to the mode of its substance. Now to understand is an altogether immaterial operation, as appears from its object; for it is from the object that any act receives its specification and nature. For a thing is understood according as it is abstracted from matter; because forms that exist in matter are individual forms which the intellect does not apprehend as such. Hence it must be that every intellectual substance is altogether immaterial.

But things distinguished by the intellect are not necessarily distinguished in reality; for the intellect does not apprehend things according to their mode of being, but according to its own. Hence material things, which are inferior to our intellect, exist in our intellect in a simpler mode than they exist in themselves. Angelic substances, on the other hand, are above our intellect. Hence our intellect cannot succeed in apprehending them as they are in themselves, but by its own mode, according as it apprehends composite things. And this is likewise the way in which it apprehends God.<sup>29</sup>

*Reply Obj. 1.* It is difference which constitutes the species. Now everything is constituted in a species according as it is determined to some special grade of being, because *the species of things are like numbers*, which differ by the addition and subtraction of unity, as the Philosopher says.<sup>30</sup> But in material things there is one thing which determines to a special grade, and that is the *form*; and another thing which is determined, and this is the *matter*; and hence the *genus* is taken from the latter, and the *difference* from the former. But in immaterial beings, there is no separate determinator and

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, IV, 2-4 (pp. 213-217).—Cf. St. Thomas, *De Subst. Sep.*, IV. <sup>26</sup> *Fons Vitar*, IV (pp. 211-256).—Cf. Dominic Gundissalinus, *De An.*, VII (p. 53). <sup>27</sup> Cf. *Fons Vitae*, II, 12 (p. 44). <sup>28</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Phys.*, III, 5 (204a 9). <sup>29</sup> Q. 3, a. 3, ad 1

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Metaph.*, VII, 3 (1043b 34).

thing determined: each being by its own self holds a determinate grade in being; and therefore in them *genus* and *difference* are not taken from different things, but from one and the same. Nevertheless, there is a difference according to our mode of conception; for, inasmuch as our intellect considers this being as indeterminate, it derives the idea of *genus*, and inasmuch as it considers it determinately, it derives the idea of difference.

*Reply Obj. 2.* This reason is given in the book the *Fount of Life*, and it would be cogent, supposing that the manner of reception by the intellect and by matter were the same. But this is clearly false. For matter receives form, that thereby it may be constituted in some species, either of air, or of fire, or of something else. But the intellect does not receive form in the same way; otherwise the opinion of Empedocles, that we know earth by earth, and fire by fire, would be true.<sup>31</sup> But the intelligible form is in the intellect according to the very nature of a form; for it is so known by the intellect. Hence such a way of receiving is not that of matter, but of an immaterial substance.

*Reply Obj. 3.* Although there is no composition of matter and form in an angel, yet there is act and potentiality. And this can be made evident if we consider the nature of material things, which contain a twofold composition. The first is that of form and matter, from which the nature is constituted. Such a composite nature is not its own being, but being is its act. Hence the nature itself is related to its own being as potentiality to act. Therefore, if there be no matter, and given that the form itself subsists without matter, there nevertheless still remains the relation of the form to its very being, as of potentiality to act. And such a composition must be understood to be in the angels. This is what some say, that an angel is composed of that *whereby he is* and *what is*,<sup>32</sup> or *being* and *what is*, as Boethius says.<sup>33</sup> For *what is* is the form itself subsisting, and the being itself is that whereby the substance is; as the running is whereby the runner runs. But in God *being* and *what is* are not different, as was explained above.<sup>34</sup> Hence God alone is pure act.

*Reply Obj. 4.* Every creature is absolutely finite, inasmuch as its being is not absolutely subsisting, but is limited to some nature to which it belongs. But there is nothing preventing a creature from being considered relatively infinite. Material creatures are infinite on the part of matter, but finite in their form, which is limited by the matter which receives it. Immaterial created substances, however, are finite in their being, but they are infinite in the sense that their forms are not received in anything else. This would be as if we were to say, for example, that whiteness existing separately is infinite as regards the nature of whiteness, since it is not contracted to any one subject; while its *being* is finite as determined to some one special nature.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De An.*, I, 2 (404b 13).  
<sup>32</sup> Cf. O. Lottin, in *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie*, XXXIV, 1932, pp. 25, 28.

<sup>33</sup> *De Hebdom.* (PL 64, 1311).  
<sup>34</sup> Q. 3, a. 4.

That is why it is said that *intelligence is finite from above*, as receiving its being from above itself, and *infinite from below*, as not received in any matter.<sup>35</sup>

### Third Article

#### WHETHER THE ANGELS EXIST IN ANY GREAT NUMBER?

*We proceed thus to the Third Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that the angels are not in great numbers. For number is a species of quantity, and follows the division of a continuous body. But this cannot be in the angels, since they are incorporeal, as was shown above. Therefore the angels cannot exist in any great number.

*Obj. 2.* Further, the more a being approaches to unity, so much the less is it multiplied, as is evident in numbers. But among other created natures the angelic nature approaches nearest to God. Therefore, since God is supremely one, it seems that there is the least possible number in the angelic nature.

*Obj. 3.* Further, the proper effect of separate substances seems to be the movement of the heavenly bodies. But the movements of the heavenly bodies fall within some small determined number, which we can comprehend. Therefore the angels are not in greater number than the movements of the heavenly bodies.

*Obj. 4.* Dionysius says that *all intelligible and intellectual substances subsist because of the rays of the divine goodness*.<sup>36</sup> But a ray is multiplied only according to the diversity of its recipients. Now it cannot be said that their matter is receptive of an intelligible ray, since intellectual substances are immaterial, as was shown above. Therefore it seems that the multiplication of intellectual substances can be only according to the requirements of the first bodies—that is, the heavenly bodies; namely, so that the descent of these divine rays may somehow reach down to them. Hence, the same conclusion is to be drawn as before.

*On the contrary*, It is said (*Dan. vii. 10*): *Thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him.*

*I answer that*, There have been various opinions with regard to the number of the separate substances. Plato contended that the separate substances are the species of sensible things.<sup>37</sup> This is as though we were to maintain that human nature is a separate substance of itself. According to this view it would have to be maintained that the number of the separate substances is the number of the species of sensible things.<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, however, refutes this view on the ground that matter is of the nature of the species of sensible things.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, separate substances cannot be the exemplary species

<sup>35</sup> *De Causis*, XVI (p. 174). <sup>36</sup> *De Div. Nom.*, IV, 1 (PG. 3, 693). <sup>37</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.*, I, 6 (987b 7). <sup>38</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, I, 11 (990b 6). <sup>39</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, VII, 1 (1042a 25).



of these sensible things; on the contrary, they have their own natures, which are higher than the natures of sensible things. Now Aristotle held that these more perfect natures are related to sensible things in the capacity of movers and ends;<sup>40</sup> and therefore he strove to find out the number of the separate substances on the basis of the number of the primary motions.

But since this appears to be against the teachings of Sacred Scripture, Rabbi Moses the Jew, wishing to bring both into harmony, held that the angels, in so far as they are named immaterial substances, are multiplied according to the number of heavenly motions or bodies, as Aristotle held.<sup>41</sup> At the same time he contended that in the Scriptures even men bearing a divine message are called angels, as are even *the powers of natural things*, which manifest God's almighty power.<sup>42</sup> It is, however, quite foreign to the custom of the Scriptures for the powers of irrational things to be designated as angels.

Hence it must be said that the angels, even inasmuch as they are immaterial substances, exist in exceeding great number, far beyond all material multitude. This is what Dionysius says: *There are many blessed armies of the heavenly intelligences, surpassing the weak and limited reckoning of our material numbers.*<sup>43</sup> The reason for this is that, since it is the perfection of the universe that God chiefly intends in the creation of things, the more perfect some things are, the greater the abundance in which they are created by God. Now, just as in bodies such abundance is determined according to their magnitude, so in incorporeal beings it is determined according to their multitude. We see, in fact, that incorruptible bodies, which are the most perfect of bodies, exceed corruptible bodies almost incomparably in magnitude; for the entire [sublunary] sphere of things active and passive is very small in comparison with the heavenly bodies. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that immaterial substances exceed material substances in multitude as it were incomparably.

*Reply Obj. 1.* In the angels number is not that of discrete quantity, caused by division of what is continuous, but that which is caused by the distinction of forms, according as multitude is reckoned among the transcendentals, as was said above.<sup>44</sup>

*Reply Obj. 2.* From the fact that the angelic nature is nearest to God, it must needs have least of multitude in its composition, but not so as to be found in few subjects.

*Reply Obj. 3.* This is Aristotle's argument,<sup>45</sup> and it would conclude necessarily if the separate substances existed for the sake of corporeal substances. For thus immaterial substances would exist to no purpose, unless some motion from them were to appear in corporeal things. But it is not true that immaterial substances exist because of the corporeal, because the end is

<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.*, XI, 8 (1073a 33; 1074a 20). <sup>41</sup> *Guide*, II, 4 (p. 157). <sup>42</sup> *Op. cit.*, II, 6 (p. 160, 161). <sup>43</sup> *De Cael. Hier.*, XIV, 1 (PG 3, 321). <sup>44</sup> Q. 30, a. 3. <sup>45</sup> *Metaph.*, XI, 8 (1073a 37).

nobler than the means to the end. Hence Aristotle himself says that this is not a necessary argument, but a probable one.<sup>46</sup> He was forced to make use of this argument, since only through sensible things can we come to know the intelligible.

*Reply Obj. 4.* This argument comes from the opinion of those who held that matter is the cause of the distinction of things. But this was refuted above.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the multiplication of the angels is not to be taken according to matter, nor according to bodies, but according to the divine wisdom devising the various orders of immaterial substances.

#### Fourth Article

#### WHETHER THE ANGELS DIFFER IN SPECIES?

*We proceed thus to the Fourth Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that the angels do not differ in species. For since the *difference* is nobler than the *genus*, all things which agree in what is noblest in them agree likewise in their ultimate constitutive difference; and so they are the same according to species. But all the angels agree in what is noblest in them—that is to say, in intellectuality. Therefore all the angels are of one species.

*Obj. 2.* Further, more and less do not change a species. But the angels seem to differ only from one another according to more and less—namely, as one is simpler than another, and of keener intellect. Therefore the angels do not differ specifically.

*Obj. 3.* Further, soul and angel are contra-distinguished from each other. But all souls are of one species. So therefore are the angels.

*Obj. 4.* Further, the more perfect a thing is in nature, the more it ought to be multiplied. But this would not be so if there were but one individual under one species. Therefore there are many angels of one species.

*On the contrary,* In things of one species there is no gradation of *first* and *second*, as the Philosopher says.<sup>48</sup> But in the angels even of the one order there are first, middle, and last, as Dionysius says.<sup>49</sup> Therefore the angels are not of the same species.

*I answer that,* Some<sup>50</sup> have said that all spiritual substances, even souls, are of the one species. Others,<sup>51</sup> again, that all the angels are of the one species, but not souls. And others<sup>52</sup> allege that all the angels of one hierarchy, or even of one order, are of the one species.

But this is impossible. For things which agree in species but differ in

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* (1074a 16). <sup>47</sup> Q. 47, a. 1. <sup>48</sup> Aristotle, *Metaph.*, II, 3 (999a 6). <sup>49</sup> *De Cael. Hier.*, X, 2 (PG 3, 273). <sup>50</sup> Cf. C. G., II, 95, where Origen is mentioned (*Peri Archon*, I, 8; II, 9 [PG 11, 176; 229]). <sup>51</sup> St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. iii, pt. 1, a. 2, q. 1 (II, 103); d. ix, a. 1, q. 1 (II, 242).—St. Albert, *In II Sent.*, d. ix, a. 7 (XXVII, 204).—Cf. prop. 81 and 96 of those condemned in 1277: H. Denifle, *Chartularium*, no. 473 (I, 548). <sup>52</sup> Alex. of Hales, *Summa Theol.*, II, I, no. 113; no. 114 (II, 153; 155).

number, agree in form but are distinguished materially. If, therefore, the angels are not composed of matter and form, as was said above, it follows that it is impossible for two angels to be of one species; just as it would be impossible to say that there are several separate whitenesses, or several humanities, since whitenesses are not several, except in so far as they are in several substances. And even if the angels had matter, not even then could there be several angels of one species. For it would then be necessary for the principle of the distinction of one from the other to be matter, but not according to the division of quantity, since the angels are incorporeal, but according to the diversity of their powers. Now such diversity of matter causes diversity not merely of species, but of genus.

*Reply Obj. 1.* *Difference* is nobler than *genus*, as the determined is more noble than the undetermined, and the proper than the common, but not as one nature is nobler than another; otherwise it would be necessary that all irrational animals be of the same species, or that there should be in them some form which is higher than the sensible soul. Therefore irrational animals differ in species according to the various determined degrees of sensitive nature; and in like manner all the angels differ in species according to the diverse degrees of intellectual nature.

*Reply Obj. 2.* More and less change the species, not according as they are caused by the intensity or weakening of one form, but according as they are caused by forms of diverse degrees; for instance, if we say that fire is more perfect than air. It is in this way that the angels are diversified according to more and less.

*Reply Obj. 3.* The good of the species preponderates over the good of the individual. Hence it is much better that the species be multiplied in the angels than that individuals be multiplied in one species.

*Reply Obj. 4.* Numerical multiplication, since it can be drawn out infinitely, is not intended by the agent, but only specific multiplication, as was said above.<sup>53</sup> Hence the perfection of the angelic nature requires the multiplying of species, but not the multiplying of individuals in one species.

#### Fifth Article

#### WHETHER THE ANGELS ARE INCORRUPTIBLE?

*We proceed thus to the Fifth Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that the angels are not incorruptible, for Damascene, speaking of the angel, says that he is *an intellectual substance, partaking of immortality by grace, and not by nature.*<sup>54</sup>

*Obj. 2.* Further, Plato says in the *Timaeus*: *O gods of gods, whose maker and father am I: You are indeed my works, dissoluble by nature, yet indis-*

<sup>53</sup> Q. 47, a. 3, ad 2.    <sup>54</sup> *De Fide Orth.*, II, 3 (PG 94, 868).

*soluble because I so will it.*<sup>55</sup> But by gods such as these Plato can understand only the angels. Therefore the angels are corruptible by their nature.

*Obj. 3.* Further, according to Gregory, *all things would tend towards nothing, unless the hand of the Almighty preserved them.*<sup>56</sup> But what can be brought to nothing is corruptible. Therefore, since the angels were made by God, it would appear that they are corruptible of their own nature.

*On the contrary,* Dionysius says that the intellectual substances *have un-failing life, being free from all corruption, death, matter, and generation.*<sup>57</sup>

*I answer that,* It must necessarily be maintained that the angels are incorruptible of their own nature. The reason for this is that nothing is corrupted except by the separation of its form from matter. Hence, since an angel is a subsisting form, as is clear from what was said above, it is impossible for its substance to be corruptible. For what belongs to anything, considered in itself, can never be separated from it; but what belongs to a thing, considered in relation to something else, can be separated, when that something else, in view of which it belonged to it, is taken away. Roundness can never be taken away from the circle, because it belongs to it of itself; but a bronze circle can lose roundness, if the bronze be deprived of its circular shape. Now *to be* belongs to a form considered in itself; for everything is an actual being through its form. Now matter is an actual being by the form. Consequently, a subject composed of matter and form ceases to be actually when the form is separated from the matter. But if the form subsists in its own being, as happens in the angels, as was said above, it cannot lose its being. Therefore, the angel's immateriality is the reason why it is incorruptible by its own nature.

A token of this incorruptibility can be gathered from its intellectual operation; for since everything acts according as it is actual, the operation of a being indicates its mode of being. Now the species and nature of the operation is understood from the object. But an intelligible object, being above time, is everlasting. Hence every intellectual substance is incorruptible of its own nature.

*Reply Obj. 1.* Damascene is dealing with perfect immortality, which includes complete immutability; since *every change is a kind of death*, as Augustine says.<sup>58</sup> The angels obtain perfect immutability only by grace, as will appear later.<sup>59</sup>

*Reply Obj. 2.* By the expression *gods* Plato understands the heavenly bodies, which he supposed to be made up of elements, and therefore dissoluble of their own nature; yet they are for ever preserved in existence by the divine will.

*Reply Obj. 3.* As was observed above,<sup>60</sup> there is a kind of necessary thing which has a cause of its necessity. Hence it is not repugnant to a necessary

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, p. 41a (trans. Chalcidius, XVI, p. 169). <sup>56</sup> *Moral.*, XVI, 37 (PL 75, 1143). <sup>57</sup> *De Div. Nom.*, IV, 1 (PG 3, 693). <sup>58</sup> *Contra Maximin.*, II, 12 (PL 42, 768). <sup>59</sup> Q. 62, a. 2 and 8. <sup>60</sup> Q. 44, a. 1, ad 2.

or incorruptible being to depend for its being on another as its cause. Therefore, when it is said that all things, even the angels, would lapse into nothing, unless preserved by God, this does not mean that there is any principle of corruption in the angels, but that the being of the angels is dependent upon God as its cause. For a thing is not said to be corruptible because God can reduce it to non-being, by withdrawing His act of preservation; but because it has some principle of corruption within itself, or some contrariety, or at least the potentiality of matter.

It is not necessary that a thing should be corruptible because it is dependent upon God for its being. For example, the sun is dependent upon God for its being, but it is not corruptible. The reason for this is that the sun is a simple being, and its being is not dependent upon God in the same way as the being of a creature is dependent upon God. The sun is a simple being, and its being is not dependent upon God in the same way as the being of a creature is dependent upon God.

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Question LI

THE ANGELS IN COMPARISON WITH BODIES

(In Three Articles)

WE next inquire about the angels in comparison with corporeal things. And in the first place about their comparison with bodies; secondly, of the angels in comparison with corporeal places;<sup>1</sup> and, thirdly, of their comparison with local movement.<sup>2</sup>

Under the first heading there are three points of inquiry: (1) Whether angels have bodies naturally united to them? (2) Whether they assume bodies? (3) Whether they exercise functions of life in the bodies assumed?

First Article

WHETHER THE ANGELS HAVE BODIES NATURALLY UNITED TO THEM?

*We proceed thus to the First Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that angels have bodies naturally united to them. For Origen says: *It is God's attribute alone—that is, it belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as a property of nature, that He is understood to exist without any material substance and without any companionship of corporeal addition.*<sup>3</sup> Bernard likewise says: *Let us assign incorporeity to God alone even as we do immortality, whose nature alone, neither for its own sake nor because of anything else, needs the help of any corporeal organ. But it is clear that every created spirit needs corporeal assistance.*<sup>4</sup> Augustine also says: *The demons are called aerial animals because their nature is akin to that of aerial bodies.*<sup>5</sup> But the nature of demons and angels is the same. Therefore angels have bodies naturally united to them.

*Obj. 2.* Further, Gregory calls an angel a rational animal.<sup>6</sup> But every animal is composed of body and soul. Therefore angels have bodies naturally united to them.

*Obj. 3.* Further, life is more perfect in the angels than in souls. But the soul not only lives, it also gives life to the body. Therefore the angels animate bodies which are naturally united to them.

<sup>1</sup>Q. 52. (PL 183, 803).  
<sup>2</sup>Q. 53. (PL 76, 1110).

<sup>3</sup>*Peri Archon*, I, 6 (PG 11, 170).

<sup>4</sup>*De Genesi ad Litt.*, III, 10 (PL 34, 284).

<sup>5</sup>*In Cant.*, Serm. VI  
<sup>6</sup>*In Evang.*, I, hom. X

*On the contrary*, Dionysius says that *the angels are understood to be incorporeal and immaterial*.<sup>7</sup>

*I answer that*, The angels have not bodies naturally united to them. For whatever belongs to any nature as an accident is not found universally in that nature. Thus, for instance, to have wings, because it is not of the essence of an animal, does not belong to every animal. But since to understand is not the act of a body, nor of any corporeal power, as will be shown later,<sup>8</sup> it follows that to have a body united to it is not of the nature of an intellectual substance, as such; but it befalls some intellectual substance because of something else. In this way it belongs to the human soul to be united to a body, because it is imperfect and exists potentially in the genus of intellectual substances, not having the fullness of knowledge in its own nature, but acquiring it from sensible things through the bodily senses, as will be explained later on.<sup>9</sup> Now whenever we find something imperfect in any genus we must presuppose something perfect in that genus. Therefore, there are some intellectual substances perfect in intellectual nature, which do not need to acquire knowledge from sensible things. Consequently not all intellectual substances are united to bodies, but some are separated from bodies. These we call angels.

*Reply Obj. 1.* As was said above, it was the opinion of some that every being is a body,<sup>10</sup> and consequently some seem to have thought that there were no incorporeal substances existing except as united to bodies,<sup>11</sup> so much so that some even held that God was the soul of the world, as Augustine tells us.<sup>12</sup> Now this is contrary to Catholic Faith, which asserts that God is exalted above all things, according to *Psalm viii. 2: Thy magnificence is exalted beyond the heavens*. Origen, therefore, through refusing to say such a thing of God, followed the opinion of others regarding the other substances,<sup>13</sup> being deceived here, as also in many other points, by following the opinions of the ancient philosophers. Bernard's expression can be explained to mean that the created spirit needs some bodily instrument, which is not naturally united to it, but assumed for some purpose, as will be explained. Augustine speaks, not as asserting the fact, but merely using the opinion of the Platonists, who maintained that there are some aerial animals, which they termed demons.<sup>14</sup>

*Reply Obj. 2.* Gregory calls the angel a rational animal metaphorically, because of the likeness to the rational nature.

*Reply Obj. 3.* To give life effectively is an absolute perfection. Hence it belongs also to God, as is said ( *1 Kings ii. 6* ): *The Lord killeth, and maketh alive*. But to give life formally belongs to a substance which is part of some

<sup>7</sup> *De Div. Nom.*, IV, 1 (PG 3, 693).   <sup>8</sup> Q. 75, a. 2.   <sup>9</sup> Q. 84, a. 6; q. 89, a. 1.  
<sup>10</sup> Q. 50, a. 1.   <sup>11</sup> Cf. Origen, *Peri Archon*, I, 6 (PG 11, 170); Pseudo-Augustine (Alcher of Clairvaux), *De Spir. et An.*, 18 (PL 40, 793).—Cf. below, q. 54, a. 5.   <sup>12</sup> *De Civit. Dei*, VII, 6 (PL 41, 199).   <sup>13</sup> *Peri Archon*, I, 6 (PG 11, 170).   <sup>14</sup> *De Civit. Dei*, VIII, 16; IX, 8 (PL 41, 241; 263).

nature, and which has not within itself the full nature of the species. Hence an intellectual substance which is not united to a body is more perfect than one which is united to a body.

### Second Article

#### WHETHER ANGELS ASSUME BODIES?

*We proceed thus to the Second Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that angels do not assume bodies. For there is nothing superfluous in the work of an angel, just as there is none in the work of nature. But it would be superfluous for the angels to assume bodies, because an angel has no need for a body, since his own power surpasses every bodily power. Therefore an angel does not assume a body.

*Obj. 2.* Further, every assumption is terminated in some union, because to assume implies a taking to oneself [*ad se sumere*]. But a body is not united to an angel as to a form, as has been stated; while in so far as it is united to the angel as to a mover, it is not said to be assumed, or otherwise it would follow that all bodies moved by the angels are assumed by them. Therefore the angels do not assume bodies.

*Obj. 3.* Further, angels do not assume bodies made of earth or water, or they could not suddenly disappear; nor again of fire, otherwise they would burn whatever things they touched; nor again of air, because air is without shape or color. Therefore the angels do not assume bodies.

*On the contrary,* Augustine says that angels appeared to Abraham under assumed bodies.<sup>15</sup>

*I answer that,* Some have maintained that the angels never assume bodies, but that all that we read in Scripture of the apparitions of angels happened in prophetic vision—that is, according to imagination.<sup>16</sup> But this is contrary to the intent of Scripture, for whatever is beheld in imaginary vision is only in the beholder's imagination, and consequently is not seen by everybody. Yet divine Scripture from time to time introduces angels so apparent as to be seen commonly by all: *e.g.*, the angels who appeared to Abraham were seen by him and by his whole family, by Lot, and by the citizens of Sodom; and in like manner the angel who appeared to Tobias was seen by all present. From all this it is clearly shown that such apparitions were beheld by bodily vision, whereby the reality seen exists outside the person beholding it, and can accordingly be seen by all. Now by such vision only a body can be beheld. Consequently, since the angels are not bodies, nor have they bodies naturally united with them, as is clear from what has been said,<sup>17</sup> it follows that they sometimes assume bodies.

*Reply Obj. 1.* Angels need an assumed body, not for themselves, but on our account, namely, so that by conversing familiarly with men they may

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, XVI, 29 (PL 41, 508).

<sup>16</sup> Maimonides, *Guide*, II, 6 (p. 162).

<sup>17</sup> A. 1;

q. 50, a. 1.



give evidence of that intellectual companionship which men expect to have with them in the life to come. Moreover, that angels assumed bodies under the Old Testament was a figurative indication that the Word of God would take a human body; because all the apparitions in the Old Testament were ordained to that whereby the Son of God appeared in the flesh.

*Reply Obj. 2.* The assumed body is united to the angel not as its form, nor merely as its mover, but as the mover represented by the assumed movable body. For, just as in the Sacred Scripture the properties of intelligible things are set forth by the likenesses of sensible things, in the same way by divine power sensible bodies are so fashioned by angels as fittingly to represent the intelligible properties of an angel. And this is what we mean by an angel assuming a body.

*Reply Obj. 3.* Although air, as long as it is in a state of rarefaction, has neither shape nor color, yet when condensed it can both be shaped and colored, as appears in the clouds. Even so the angels assume bodies of air, condensing it by divine power in so far as is needful for forming the assumed body.

#### Third Article

WHETHER THE ANGELS EXERCISE FUNCTIONS OF LIFE IN THE BODIES ASSUMED?

*We proceed thus to the Third Article:—*

*Objection 1.* It would seem that the angels exercise functions of life in assumed bodies. For a pretense of truth is unbecoming in angels. But it would be pretense if the body assumed by them, which seems to live and to exercise vital functions, did not possess these functions. Therefore the angels exercise functions of life in the assumed body.

*Obj. 2.* Further, in the works of the angels there is nothing without a purpose. But eyes, nostrils, and the other instruments of the senses, would be fashioned without a purpose in the body assumed by the angel, if he did not perceive by their means. Consequently, the angel perceives by the assumed body; and this is the most special function of life.

*Obj. 3.* Further, to move hither and thither is one of the functions of life, as the Philosopher says.<sup>18</sup> But the angels are manifestly seen to move in their assumed bodies. For it is said (*Gen. xviii. 16*) that *Abraham walked with the angels, who had appeared to him, bringing them on the way*; and when Tobias said to the angel (*Tob. v. 7, 8*): *Knowest thou the way that leadeth to the city of the Medes?* he answered: *I know it; and I have often walked through all the ways thereof.* Therefore the angels often exercise functions of life in assumed bodies.

*Obj. 4.* Further, speech is the function of a living subject, for it is produced by the voice, while the voice itself is a sound conveyed from the

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *De An.*, II, 2 (413a 23).