

The Angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*⁽¹⁾

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Recently, there was an interesting survey of the public opinion on the existence of angels in USA. According to the joint survey with CNN TV, the Times reports that the sixty-nine percents of the five hundred adult people believe in angels. The people seem to take more interest in angels than before because of a dark moral atmosphere. As for my self, I have had some mysterious experiences about an angel. It was about ten years ago. I saw in my night dream that a shining galaxy of angels were rising and falling in the sky raising a swinging state of mind within me. When I awoke, I noticed that somebody extinguished the fire of the stove in my room where no one was except me and no one entered—so I was told later when I asked my family. If the fire had continued burning, I must have been suffocated in the end. I was wondering who on the earth put out the fire so providentially. At that time as well as even now, I could not but think some angel from heaven was kind enough to put out the fire so that I might not be killed. I believe so even now. A similar thing happened several years ago so that I can be alive now physically. While I was driving an auto-bicycle at a rainy night, it fell down because of the ill condition of the road, I was thrown off on the road. I remember how I was rolling with my head up and down twice or thrice on the road where a traffic was rather dense. I could not think of anything except that I must come home. With some scars on my knees, I took my auto-bicycle again and I went home safely. When I got home I noticed I lost my bag, so on the following morning I returned to the place where I was thrown off the auto-bicycle, I was told by a policeman there that there was a large accident on the previous night, and that a driver was seriously injured to escape someone who was thrown off the auto-bicycle. I told the policeman that it was I that had been thrown off the auto-bicycle on the road. He inquired several questions of me and gave me the bag which he found on the spot—it was mine. I believed that my Lord saved me from the death at the cost of the serious injury of the other who should be rewarded with something good by my Lord. These experiences of mine convinced

me of the existence of supernatural beings keeping man from danger.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, we can witness the constant presence of the spiritual beings as Adam says:

Millions of spiritual Creatures walk the Earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep:
All these with ceaseless praise his works behold
Both day and night: how oft'n from the steep
Of echoing Hill or Thicket have we heard
Celestial voices to the midnight air,
Sole, or responsive each to others note
Singing thir great Creator: oft in bands
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
With Heav'nly touch of instrumental sounds
In full harmonic number joind, thir songs
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven.

(IV, 677-88)

Adam could see the spiritual creatures because he was not yet fallen and because angels still remained there.

Today, however, we cannot see them so constantly for the just two reasons that angels left the earth after man committed the original sin and that man's spirituality was degenerated as a result of the fall. Milton describes the abandonment of the earth by the angels:

Up into Heav'n from Paradise in hast
Th' Angelic Guards ascended, mute and sad
For Man...

(X, 17-21)

For one thing, angels deserted the earth because they cannot tolerate the impurity of the paradise. Man had to leave Paradise because this time the paradise itself cannot tolerate the fallenness of man. Only nature was ordained to remain friends with man; she was also cursed with the fall of man. Consider how nature was to bemoan when man first transgressed by eating the forbidden fruit. First, at the sin of Eve:

(So saying her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluckd and eat:)
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat

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Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost.

(IX, 780-84)

Second, at the sin of Adam:

(he scrupl'd not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd,
But fondly overcome with Femal charm.)
Earth trembl'd from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
Skie lowr'd and muttering Thunder, som sad drops
Wept at completion of the mortal Sin
Original....

(IX, 997-1004)

I quoted the passage to show how the original sin was fatal to man and nature and that man cannot see angels as freely as before: angels visit us only when they are told to do so by God. Elsewhere, Milton writes about this in his poem *Comus*:

Mortals that would follow me,
Love vertue, she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to clime
Higher than the Spheary chime;
Or if Vertue feeble were,
Heav'n itself would stoop to her.

(ll. 1018-23)

Milton writes of the existence of the transcendental help from heaven through the mouth of the attendant Spirit. In view of my mysterious experience of being saved from destruction, what he says seems to be true. As for the fall of man, the second reason for man's inability to see angel, suffice it to quote from Swedenborg:

That man is just as much a man after death, although he does not appear before our eyes, can be established from the angels seen by Abraham, Gideon, Daniel and other prophets, from the angels seen in the Lord's sepulchre, and later, as so often [described] by John in the Apocalypse; and especially from the Lord Himself when He showed His disciples by means of touch and by eating with them that He was Man, and yet He became invisible before their eyes. That they saw Him was because the eyes of their spirit were then opened, and when these are opened, the thinge of the spiritual world appear as clearly as the things of the natural world.⁽²⁾

What then is the angel? According to Swedenborg, he is originated from man. That is, an angel is the spiritualization of man. Of course, man should be in goodness, truth and charity while alive in this world in order to be made into a celestial angel. If we have Truth of the Lord and Charity toward man we shall be made into celestial angels. I'd like to believe in this idea.

Milton's view of angels is not so different from that of Swedenborg. What does Milton say about this in the story of *Paradise Lost*? I can quote his remarkable idea of man's transubstantiation by eating food:

time may come when men
With angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient Diet, nor too light Fare
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improv'd by tract of time, and wingd ascend
Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice
Here or in Heav'nly Paradise dwell;
If ye found obedient, and retain
Unalterably firm his love entire
Whose progenie you are.

(The Italics are mine.)

(V, 493-503)

Our whole being is to become a celestial angel when we keep the command of God. That is to say, man can return to God not only by eating food, but by keeping the law. It is because the system of universe is ordained in this way. Milton writes about this:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not depriv'd from good, created all,
Such to perfection. . . .

(V, 469-72)

It is truly said that man is not to live on bread only but also on the words of God.

I'd like to conclude the essay with the mention of the healing power of spirits. In Milton's *Comus* Sabrina, a kind of goddess has a miraculous power of healing by means of which she healed the enchanted virgin, the Lady with drops from the pure fountain:

Shepherd, 'tis my office best

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To help insnared chastity;
Brightest Lady look on me,
Thus I sprinkle on thy brest
Drops that from my fountain pure,
I have kept of precious cure,
Thrice upon thy fingers tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip,
Next this marble venom'd seat
Smear'd with gumms of glutenous heat
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold,
Now the spell hath lost his hold;
And I must haste ere morning hour
To wait in *Amphitrite's* bowr.

(ll. 907-21)

Above, Sabrina, the Nymph, emancipated the Lady who had been spell-bound by Comus the libidinous bestial man. Likewise, in *Paradise Lost*, the archangel Michael restores Adam's eyes to the former pure ones:

but to nobler sight
Michael from Adam's eyes the Filme remov'd
Which that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight
Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue
The visual Nerve, for he had much to see;
And from the Well of Life three drops instill'd.
So deep the power of these Ingredients pierc'd
Even to inmost seat of mental sight,
That Adam now enforc't to close his eyes,
Sunk down and all his spirits became intransit:
But him the gentle Angel by the hand
Soon rais'd, and his attention thus recalld.

(XI, 411-22)

Michael's remedy was not just for the physical eyes but also for the spiritual eyes since he cures Adam's mental sight. The best way of remedy is not just for the physical but also the spiritual, for man is spiritual in essence and the spiritual includes morality and intellect.

So the best physician is one who can cure man's relation with God. For since the day Adam perverted our relationship with God, man came to know illness both moral and physical. The physical illness is a result of our moral or spiritual illness. The best example for this is, of course, AIDS which is infectious mainly through committing immoral behaviour that our Lord sternly prohibits. Much illness is caused by the violation of the divine law—that is to revere Him and to keep the image of God in our soul. So if we remain moral or spiritual as a result of keeping the divine law, we are kept from the majority of illness. Adam wonders why man once created as *Imago Dei*, that is, the image of God, suffers seriously from illness:

Can thus

Th' Image of God in Man created once
So goodly and erect, though faultie since,
To such unsightly sufferings be debas't
Under inhuman pains? Why should not Man,
Retaining still Divine similitude
In part, from such deformities be free,
And for his Makers Image sake exempt?

(XI, 507-14)

Adam's question is answered by Michael as follows:

Thir Makers Image, answerd *Michael*, then
Forsook them, when themselves they villifi'd
To serve ungovernd appetite, and took
His Image whom they serv'd, a brutish vice,
Inductive mainly to the sin of *Eve*.
Therefore so abject is thir punishment,
Disfiguring not Gods likeness, but thir own,
Or if his likeness, by themselves defac't
While they pervert pure Natures healthful rules
To loathsom sickness, worthily, since they
Gods Image did not reverence in themselves.

(XI, 515-25)

The "inhuman pains" are a result of man's "ungovernd appetite" and perversion of the "pure Natures rule" to the "loathsome sickness." God is not supposed to be so harsh upon us; He wants us to die peacefully. As long as we keep the divine law we mentioned

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just above, we can come to death and mix our connatural dust without pains. Michael tells Adam as follows:

if thou well observe
The rule of not too much, by temperance taught
In what thou eatst and drinkst, seeking from thence
Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight,
Till many years over thy head return:
So maist thou live, till like ripe Fruit thou drop
Into thy Mothers lap, or be with ease
Gatherd, not harshly pluckt, for death mature. . . .

(XI, 530-37)

This is the death which our Lord wants us to die. But we are not limited only to this world. We must face the severe day of Last Judgment. So the best physician is he who can cure man's relationship with God. Only from this remedy comes all the goodness in life including good health.

From above we are now definitely certain that angels are in heaven or in *adistance* dimension, always keeping those people from the danger of deviating from the right relationship with God. We must someday die. Our body must be decomposed into the connatural dust. So comparatively speaking, physical cure is not so important as the spiritual cure—the ultimate recovery of our relationship with God. The man who cure our spiritual illness is the best perfect physician. Then who is the best physician? In Christianity it is the Son of God who completed man's redemption from his final foe, edath, by his own sacrifice.

Notes

- (1) The paper was originally read at the Medicina Alternative World Congress sponsored by Zoroastrian College, at Russian Cultural Centre, Bombay, 30th January 1994.
- (2) Imanuel Swedenbrg, *The Last Judgment* (The Swedenborg Society, 1961), p.102.

References:

- The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. by Helen Darbishier, two vols set, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, 1962.
- Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Last Judgment*, London: The Swedenborg Society, 1961.