

## Worshipping with the Angels

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Angels do not figure prominently on any theological agenda these days. The familiar mention of guardian angels in childhood prayers may find an occasional echo in adult petitions, but our day-to-day piety does not reckon with angelic presence. That probably has less to do with an unconscious process of demythologisation than with a faith which is directly focused on the gracious presence of God in Christ. Our personal spirituality is certainly built on the foundation of a divine presence which is mediated, but not mediated through angelic beings – unless, with Revelation, we see Christ as the Angel of God (see Strelan on Rev 7:2,3; 8:3-5; 10:1-4; 20:1).

Yet those of us who celebrate the divine presence with the ancient liturgy of the western mass are continually confronted with the angels as our worshipping counterparts, even as our partners in worship. The church militant and triumphant is one as it gives thanks to the *Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*. So we sing: *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we adore and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you* (the Preface). The Sanctus or Trisagion which follows echoes the theme of angelic worship as it describes the Holy One as the *Lord God of hosts* whose glory fills heaven and earth. Yet this motif of worshipping in the presence of and with the angelic hosts is relatively weak in the West when compared with its strong development in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, where the iconography of the eternal world always surrounds worshippers, and the sacred liturgy continually fills their ears with reminders of the presence of angelic partners in worship (Hofius: 172-178).

That corporate Christian worship entails participation in celestial praise which continues where our earthly praise finishes is a prominent biblical theme. My purpose here is to attempt only an outline of its development, and to discuss how the theme throws added light on some passages in the New Testament. What the theme of celestial worship might mean for our modern debates on the meaning of worship, on the relevance of ritual itself, and on the forms of worship to be employed is not my immediate concern. But, as a side comment, I would suggest that worshipping with the angels is a strange setting for much of the sentimental and banal material which passes for Christian praise in some modern songbooks and 'contemporary' liturgies.

### **The homage of Yahweh by the heavenly hosts**

Like an earthly potentate, Yahweh has his heavenly court. Whether they be called *male'akhim*, *bene 'elohim*, or *khedoshim* (angels, heavenly beings, or holy ones), the function of these beings is to reflect the glory of Yahweh and to serve his absolute lordship. They are not a minor pantheon; they are never objects of worship. Their first task as members of the heavenly court is, naturally, to give homage to the heavenly King. Thus, all the '*elohim*-beings are to worship Yahweh since he is exalted far above all

gods' (Ps 97:7, 9). Their second task is to stand ready to do his bidding as he rules the world. These two features are seen in Psalm 103:19, 20:

*Bless the Lord, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his word ...*

*Bless the Lord, all his hosts,  
his ministers that do his will!*

What is the connection between this angelic adoration and worship of Yahweh on earth, whether by the animate or inanimate creation? The end of Psalm 103, with its call for angels to bless the Lord, echoes the beginning where the psalmist calls on his own *nephesh*, his soul, to praise the Lord (v 1). Earthly praise is to reflect celestial homage. That point can also be seen in the arrangement and subject matter of the last three psalms in the Psalter. Psalm 148 begins its summons to adoration of Yahweh on a cosmic scale by calling for 'praise from the heavens ... in the heights above ... Praise him, all his angels, praise him all his heavenly hosts' (vv 1,2). Next comes the call for the created world to praise its maker, beginning with the celestial bodies and ending with animals and birds (vv 3-10; this is probably what is meant also in Psalm 69:34: 'Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves therein'). Finally, all human beings, from kings to little children, are called to praise the Lord (vv 10-14). Psalm 149 then summons God's people as his saints (*chasidim*) to praise him in their assembly (*qahal*) and in all situations. This general summons then receives its proper cultic setting in Psalm 150 where 'Praise God in his sanctuary' is matched by 'Praise God in his mighty heavens' (v 1). Everything that has *nephesh* is to join in the hallelujah. There is no need to mention the inanimate world which has no *nephesh*. Its praise is expressed vicariously by the animate world, whether human or angelic.

It is not explicitly stated that the heavenly and earthly realms actually *join* in offering their praise (contra Hofius: 181). The psalmist acknowledges the presence of the angels in the temple in Psalm 138:1,2 ('Before the gods I sing thy praise; I bow down toward thy holy temple'). Further, the singing of the Lord's glory by inanimate creation is to match the cry of 'Glory!' which goes up in the temple, whether from the lips of angels or mortals (Ps 29:1,2,9). Yet there is no suggestion that the angelic beings actually participate in the earthly cult. Nor is that indicated by the angels ascending and descending in Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen 28:12). Since angelic beings underline the divine presence, they certainly mark the place as a cultic site, as 'the house of God, ... the gate of heaven' (v 17), but there is no suggestion that the ramp is meant to link heaven and earth in the sense that angels participate in earthly worship, or human beings are drawn into heavenly places.

Nor is that implied in the famous 'temple vision' in Isaiah 6. The prophet sees Yahweh enthroned in glory, with the train of his royal robe spilling out to fill the whole *heykhal*. Is this 'hall' the heavenly sanctuary or the temple in Jerusalem? Surely both are meant, and that for two reasons. First, temple and temple worship are where God is present (thus they are never creations of either heavenly or earthly agents), and God is present in both the celestial and terrestrial sphere, specifically, in the Jerusalem temple. Secondly, God makes his holy presence (his *panim* and his *khavodh*) dwell in the earthly sanctuary

which is a copy of its heavenly prototype (see Exod 25:40 and Heb 8:5; this typology is common in the ancient orient; it is not restricted to Hebrew thought). There is thus a close connection between heavenly and earthly cult, but Isaiah's vision contains a stark contrast between the worshipping seraphs singing the Trisagion and the prophet himself who does not participate, and whose unholiness renders him dumb – the verb *nidhmethi* in Isaiah 6:5, translated by the NIV with 'I am ruined!' and by the JB with 'I am lost!', literally means 'I am struck dumb'! The glory of the Lord spills from his throne room into the world ('the whole earth is full of his glory'; v 3), but it is only the seraphs who sing the Sanctus.

### **On the way to a new song**

The writings of the New Testament allude to or explicitly picture a new cultus in which the 'new song' is sung by both heavenly and earthly voices (Rev 14:1-3). Why the change? And what is new about a song whose words in the book of Revelation still come, to a large extent, from the Hebrew Bible? The discontinuity between worship under the two covenants should not lead us to overlook some vital continuities which become apparent when we place the worship of the first Christians in its proper setting: the multifarious entity we call late Judaism.

Post-exilic Judaism not only knows of angelic worship in heavenly places, but it also pictures angels descending to the worship of God's people and ascending with their prayers (this seems to be the meaning of Test. Levi 3:7). This does not mean that the great gap between heaven and earth is bridged to form a partnership in worship. In his apocalyptic visions Enoch sees and hears the worship of God by the heavenly spirits as they sing a new Sanctus: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Spirits; he fills the earth with spirits' (1 Enoch 39:12). But the seer himself can bless and praise God only as an onlooker who has been translated in the heavenly realms (see v 9; also 71:1-11; Test. Levi 5:1); he is not part of the heavenly worship. He hears the heavenly intercessions for those who are on earth, but he is not part of the celestial hosts (1 Enoch 40:1-6). He remains a spectator and auditor, not a participator (see also 2 Enoch 17:1). In fact, the transcendent majesty of God which demands that the seer be transported from earth to heaven finally mediates a picture of heavenly worship as totally other, as totally removed from this temporal plane. Witnessing the heavenly mysteries in apocalyptic dream-visions only underlines the sense of distance and separation from the world in which they take place. Already the strange sights and sounds which the prophet experiences in Ezekiel 1 underline that he, a mere 'son of man', does not belong in the other world!

The observation which Otto A Piper of Princeton Theological Seminary made over forty years ago was, thus, generally correct: 'Jewish religion kept a close watch over the entrance to heaven and refused access to it to all mortals. Heavenly and earthly worship might be parallel, but they could not be blended' (Piper: 11). But Piper's comment was made in 1951, and without taking into account the new data from Qumran.

For the Qumran covenanters heavenly and earthly worship do not merely run parallel. Here, for the first time in Judaism, we have a new feature: in their worship and praise of God, the elect and holy people join themselves to the angels. Parallelism of worship is replaced by partnership in worship (Hofius: 182-186; Weinfeld: 429-431). Human beings

join with angels in a priestly sacrifice of praise. A few texts from the *Hodayoth* will demonstrate the difference. The psalmist, surely speaking on behalf of the community of the elect, thanks God for raising him to 'everlasting height':

Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin that it may stand with the host of the Holy Ones, and that it may enter into community with the congregation of the Sons of Heaven. Thou hast allotted to man an everlasting destiny amidst the spirits of knowledge, that he may praise Thy Name in a common rejoicing and recount Thy marvels before all Thy works. (1QH 3.19-23; translation by G Vermes: 173)

Similarly, in 1 QH 11.11,12 the psalmist thanks God that he can 'partake of the lot of Thy Holy Ones; ... that the perverse spirit (may be lifted); ... that he may stand before Thee with the everlasting host and with [Thy] spirits [of holiness], to be renewed together with all the living and to rejoice together with them that know' (see also 2.6,7; 5.3,4; 11:25,26; 18.23; IQSa2.3-11).

Human beings and angels not only sing together; they also have a common lot (*goral*), they share an eternal possession and inheritance (1QS 11.7, 8). They also fight side by side in the holy war (1QM 7.6; 12.4). It is thus idle to ask whether the *milchamah* of the Qumran sectarians is a terrestrial or a celestial war; it is both, because the battle to preserve the holiness of God's people and of his land is just one aspect of the confession of his holy name. Here there is a genuine partnership between heaven and earth.

Another interesting feature in the picture of the angelic liturgies appears in a fragmentary text found at Qumran. The text 4Q *Shirot* 'Olat Ha-Shabbat pictures the angelic priesthood functioning in the heavenly temple. Yet *the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* do not give the words of their praise. Why the silence? Is it because the language of angels is not any human tongue (see 1 Cor 13:1; 2 Cor 12:4)? Did the Qumran people worship in angelic tongues? There is a simpler and more obvious explanation. The heavenly hosts not only adore God with a 'roar of praise'; they also express their adoration with 'a sound of quiet silence', with a 'whispered divine voice' and 'whispered blessings' (4Q405; Vermes: 228). The correlation between the two spheres, earthly and heavenly, means that also angelic praise must be marked by the worshipful silence which the whole created order observes in the presence of the Lord who is in his holy temple (Hab 2:20; Zech 2:13). Silence is the posture of worship also because revelation takes place not only in mighty sounds, but also in the 'sound of silence' (1 Kings 19:12; see Job 4:16).

Why this new partnership between mortals and angels in the Qumranic worship? Though the whole community considered itself to be a holy priesthood and a spiritual temple, offering up the sacrifice of praise, it did not have a physical temple. It rejected the Jerusalem temple, priesthood, and sacrifices, but was not yet in a position to rebuild the sanctuary according to the 'correct' specifications contained in the Temple Scroll. We may speculate that Qumran's stress on the presence of the angels in its worship is partly to be explained as a compensation for the (temporary) loss of the temple, the earthly house of God. The presence of the heavenly holy ones ensures the presence of God on earth.

## Where earth and heaven meet

This last statement is true also in the New Testament, but here we do not have to speculate why and how heaven and earth can meet in worship. They meet *in* the person of Christ, and they meet as the new song of praise is directed to Christ. In the synoptic tradition, the decisive moments of Jesus' birth, temptation, passion, and resurrection are marked by angelic presence. In these instances the angels are not merely *angeli interpretes*, angelic interpreters. They confirm the divine presence. So it is fitting that their announcement of 'peace on earth' in the Gloria in Luke 2:14 should be echoed by Simeon's readiness to 'depart in peace' as he holds the child Jesus in his arms (2:28). Even more interesting is the way in which the angelic announcement of 'peace on earth' is echoed by the praise of Jesus' disciples at his entry into Jerusalem. They acclaim the messianic King with 'Peace *in heaven* and glory in the highest!' Heaven and earth join hands around their King. Angels announce peace on earth, while humans announce peace in heaven!

What is implicit in the synoptics becomes explicit in John's gospel. The angels 'ascending and descending on the Son of man' (John 1:51) confirm him as God's emissary who brings earth and heaven together. God's glory has been revealed in the incarnate *logos*, the word made flesh. He is the new 'tent of meeting', the new temple, the new focus of worship in Spirit and in truth (1:14; 2:19-22; 4:23). The relative absence of angels in the fourth gospel, apart from 1:51, 12:29 and 20:12, is striking but understandable. The Son who comes from and returns to the Father is the final agent of revelation, the ultimate assurance of God's presence in this world, and the agent who draws believers into the Father's presence to worship him.

Like John, Paul is not particularly interested in the angelic world. Yet there are hints in the Pauline corpus of the theme of a new cosmic worship inaugurated by the exaltation of the risen Christ. According to the Christ hymn of Philippians, glory is given to God by the confession to Jesus as Lord on the part of heavenly, earthly, and even subterranean creatures (Phil 2:10,11). The hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 which speaks of the pre-eminence of Christ over things 'in heaven and on earth' is prefaced by a call to give 'thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light' since he has delivered them from the realm of darkness and transferred them to the kingdom of his Son (1:12, 13).

We have earlier noted that the concept of sharing a common lot with the angelic 'holy ones' is prominent in the psalms of Qumran. The linguistic parallel between 1QH 3.22 and 11.11 on the one hand, and Colossians 1:12 on the other, is so striking that we are justified in understanding the *klēros tōn hagiōn* as a common lot with the heavenly 'holy ones'. Certainly, the text does not speak of worship with the heavenly hagioi, but it is more than a little significant that the call to worship (1:12-14) is immediately followed by the hymnic adoration of the Son in whom 'all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities' (1:15,16). There is, at the very least, a strong hint that those who have been transferred from light to darkness now worship with the angelic holy ones who are at home in the heavenly realm of light.

This reading of the text finds support in Ephesians. In the first place, there is the parallelism between Colossians 1:12 and Ephesians 1:18, though the latter text speaks of the glorious *klēronomia en tois hagiois* instead of the *klēros tōn hagiōn*. That this 'inherited lot among the saints' must again refer to the readers' status as people who now belong to heavenly realms is suggested by the preceding context. The elaborate liturgical blessing of 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' in Ephesians 1:3-10 is framed by an *inclusio* which recalls the motif we are pursuing. Verse 3 recalls that God has poured out 'every blessing in the heavenly places', while verse 10 places this blessing within the total plan of God to unite all things in Christ, 'things in heaven and things on earth'. According to Ephesians, this plan is realised now as believers are raised with Christ to sit with him in the heavenly places (2:6). Earthly barriers of hostility which divided peoples have been removed by Christ (2:11-17). But members of God's household on earth have even become 'fellow citizens with the saints' in heaven (2:19). The *hagioi* of this text are again, surely, the angels (as in 1:18). In worship the saints on earth are already now in heavenly places, are already in the heavenly temple in which God's Spirit dwells (2:21, 22). It is not said in so many words that humans and angels worship together, but this can be assumed to be just as self-evident for the writer and readers of Ephesians as it is for the members of the Qumran community (see 1 QH 3.23; 11.14; Hofius: 190).

Such a union is more clearly hinted at in First Corinthians chapters 11-14, as Paul tries to bring order to worship at Corinth. Two cryptic comments are of special interest: a woman/wife is to have *exousia* on her head 'because of the angels' (11:10); worship can be in human and angelic tongues (13:1). Whatever else Paul might mean, he obviously presupposes agreement on one thing: angels are present when Christians are gathered for worship as God's temple (3:16, 17). That may throw further light on the threefold call for silence in 14:28-34. In three successive statements silence is enjoined on those who speak in tongues, on those with a word of prophecy, and on wives (the following reference to husbands' shows that wives and not women in general is meant). It is clear that an absolute interdict on speaking in the worship assembly is not Paul's intention in each of the three cases – 11:2-10 shows that women, too, did pray and prophesy in the congregational assembly at Corinth. Nor are we to assume that Paul merely demands silence in the place of a certain kind of speaking, namely argumentative or asserting speaking, though this is also implied. He is telling the Corinthians, proud of speech-gifts as signs that they are *pneumatikoi*, that silence is as much a sign of proper worship as is much speaking. The apostle is thus recalling Habbakuk 2:20 ('The Lord is in his temple; let all the earth keep silence before him'), and enjoining the submission of worshipful silence before the Lord as expressed in Psalm 37:7 and 62:1,5 (LXX 36:7 and 61:1,5; the Septuagint actually uses the verb *hypotassomai* to translate Hebrew words expressing silence). We have earlier noted the worshipful silence of angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls, a silence also observed in the heavenly worship in Revelation 8:1.

All this suggests that the angels referred to in First Corinthians 11:10 cannot be the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 whose lustful gaze is to be averted by women wearing a head-covering. Rather, as Antoinette Clark Wire has suggested in her book on the women prophets at Corinth, Paul is here presupposing the view that angels are active participants in Christian worship. What he also presupposes is the idea that angels are to be given no

cause to worship the creature instead of the Creator. Angels who are guardians of order in worship are themselves to observe order (Wire: 121).

### **Worshipping in the angelic festal gathering (Hebrews)**

Since Hebrews is a clarion call to worship, the plea to the readers not to neglect to meet together (10:25) is anything but an incidental comment. The author seeks to lift the flagging spirits of his readers by recalling all that is either stated or implied in their confession. Christ, as the great High Priest of the new covenant based on better sacrifices, is the heavenly liturgist who draws believers into the presence of God. As worship leader he establishes a new 'drawing near' to God which is itself priestly in character (see especially 4:16; 10:19).

It is not coincidental that ten of the twelve references to angels in Hebrews come in the first two chapters. That is to be expected in a call to worship, since worship involves the angels! The question is: how are they involved? One answer can be ruled out from the start. There is no suggestion in Hebrews of a worship directed to angels (see Col 2:18). In a previous study I have argued that the rhetoric of Hebrews is epideictic and that the comparison (*synkrisis*) between the Son and the angels is characteristic of this genre of oratory, designed as it is to set forth the praise of a person – in this case, praise of Christ (Pfitzner: 4, 8). The problem of the 'Hebrews' is not some angelic cult, but failure on their part to draw the necessary conclusions from their own confession to Jesus as the exalted Son. So the angels are not merely a hypothetical foil to Christ. Any comparison between Christ and angels is ludicrous until it is seen that the angels establish Christ's exalted status as Son precisely because they worship him. So the issue is not merely the status of the angels compared to that of the Son (Heb 1:5). That question is finally decided in terms of function (1:6-14). In the description of function, the first statement corresponds to the last: 'Let all God's angels worship him' (v 6), and 'Are they not all ministering [*leitourgika*] spirits ...' (v 14). Here, as in the Psalms (see 103:19, 20 referred to above), worship and wider service are combined (Heb 1:7), but it is as *leitourgika pneumata* that the angels are sent out to serve mortals with the message of salvation. In sum, the whole of Hebrews chapter 1 does not merely argue for what is, after all, rather obvious: the superiority of Christ over the angels. It points also to the angels as exemplary worshippers. The readers are invited to join with the angels in their praise of the Son who for a little while was even lower than the angels (2:5-9).

However, emulation of angelic worship is not yet partnership with angels in worship. Hebrews announces that explicitly for the first time at 12:22-24: the readers 'have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, ... and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect ...' (NRSV). This is not a proleptic statement – as if persistence in the faith will be rewarded only in the future by union with the world of angels and other spirits. The invitation to 'draw near' to God (4:16; 19:22) would make little sense unless it were intended as an invitation to prayer and worship in the present on the basis of Christ's act of bringing newly cleansed people into the divine presence. The new priestly people has open access into the heavenly sanctuary referred to in 8:1 and 9:12, 24.

It is in worship that believers have already arrived at the ‘city which is to come’ where they can ‘continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name’ (13:15). In worship a new priestly people enters the Holy of Holies which the heavenly High Priest opened up by the sanctifying power of his blood (9:12; 10:19-21). They have left the old covenant, mediated through angels at Sinai (2:2), to come to the eternal Zion, there to celebrate with all the hosts of heaven the new covenant of grace. The *panegyris* of celestial beings is joined to the *ekklēsia* of the first-born to form a cosmic celebration in which even the spirits of the dead can praise God (12:22, 23)!

That Hebrews is echoing the Qumranic theme of partnership with the angels in worship finds some support in the text of Hebrews 1:6. ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’. Though there are possible echoes here of Psalm 97(LXX 96):7, the writer appears to be citing a conflated version of Deuteronomy 32:43 (from the Song of Moses) as it appears in the Septuagint:

*Let the sons of God worship him.*

*And let all the angels of God ascribe strength to him.*

Obviously, the author wanted to avoid using the title ‘sons of God’ for the angels, since their task is to adore Christ as the Son. But it is interesting to note that the wording corresponds closely to that found at Qumran: ‘Prostrate yourselves before him, all gods’ (4QDt. 32:43). This helps to explain why the shorter text also appears in the popular version of the Song of Moses in the book of Odes which was appended to the Psalter (see Ode 2:43). Without suggesting that Hebrews is directly dependant on Qumran, the letter does reflect the same concern to link the praise of angels (Heb 1:6) with the praise of human beings (13:15).

### **Worshipping with the angels in the Revelation**

It is ‘on the Lord’s day’ that the seer receives ‘the revelation of Jesus Christ’ (Rev 1:1, 10). And it is in the context of celestial worship that the great cycle of visions and auditions begins in Revelation 4 and 5. There is a quite remarkable parallel between the descriptions of the setting of this worship and its participants in Hebrews and Revelation (Couratin: 288). There is the Judge seated on his throne (Rev 4:3; Heb 12:23) surrounded by a priestly people offering homage and the sacrifice of praise (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 4:4; 5:10; Heb 12:22-24; 13:15, 16). There is the festal gathering of myriads of angels (Rev 5:11; Heb 12:22), and in the centre is Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant and the blood by which worshippers have been cleansed (Rev 5:6, 9; 7:9,14; Heb 12:24; see Strelan on these texts).

Whereas Hebrews gives no words of the ‘sacrifice of praise’ (13:15) offered up with the angelic hosts, Revelation gives a very full picture. The four living creatures, like cantors in the heavenly liturgies, ceaselessly sing the Sanctus. Its words no longer correspond exactly to the Sanctus of Isaiah 6:3 in the Septuagint (‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts’). Instead the holy Lord is proclaimed as *ho theos ho pantocrator* (Rev 4:8). He is the Pantocrator because he is both Creator and Redeemer (4:11; 5:9). That is why the whole cosmos is involved in worship. The four living creatures say their ‘Amen’ to the



adoration of the elders, of creation, and of the whole universe (5:8-14). What is perhaps most fascinating, however, is the way in which the *Vere Dignus*, 'You are worthy', first addressed to 'our Lord and God' in 4:11, is then addressed to the Lamb in 5:12. It is because of the Lamb that heaven and earth join hands in worship around God's throne.

If Christians worship with heavenly hosts, does worship mean a proleptic separation from this world? Is it removal from a still groaning creation to enter into a new creation which we cannot yet see? Some of us may complain that what passes as worship is sometimes so mundane and banal that there is not the slightest sense of having one foot in heaven – this world is too much with us for that! Others may counter that some liturgical celebration is so heavenly that it is of no earthly significance. Surely worship is meant to celebrate more than the success of God's mission to us; it should send us out on God's mission to the world (see the *missa est* of the Latin mass).

At this point the book of Revelation is instructive. Its vision of heaven and earth united in worship forms both prelude, continuous accompaniment, and postlude to the grand symphony telling of a new heaven and a new earth. Worshipping with the angels is not turning a blind eye to the evils of this world, nor is it an expression of world-renunciation. Revelation shows that the celebration of Christ's victory in worship is the setting for the enactment of that victory in a world which is to be renewed, not destroyed.

Included with angels, elders, and living creatures in the celestial worship are the white-robed martyrs who have endured the tribulation and now serve in the heavenly temple before God's throne (Rev 7:9-17). Yet the theme of vindication for the saints runs parallel to another major theme: divine judgment on the powers of this world which are guilty of injustice, whether these powers be political or commercial (see especially chapter 18 with its tirade against the merchants of the world).

It is important to note that each new vista in the kaleidoscopic drama of Revelation contains a vision of heavenly worship (Rev 4, 5; 7:9-17; 11:15-19; 12:10-12; 14:1-5; 15:1-8; 19:1-10; 21:1 - 22:5). That which either precedes or which follows these liturgical interludes, whether it be judgment or vindication, is thus marked as the will of God who sits on the throne. There is a further important inference to be drawn. It is in worship that God's creatures, earthly and heavenly, participate in the divine drama which is to end in the destruction of evil and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

When the purpose of Christian worship is viewed merely as the confirmation of the privileged position held by God's elect in separation from the world, and not as the equipping of the saints for service in the world, such worship is no longer truly heavenly or truly earthly. In fact, earthly worship will be truly heavenly when the church militant is enlisted to join the saints triumphant in God's crusade against evil.

## Conclusion

Liturgical renewal is the renewal of God's people in worship. It is not merely a matter of finding the right language, ritual and music, of blending modern tastes with ancient traditions while still preserving a sense for the catholicity of worship. Renewal will come about only where there is the proper sense of liturgy as the *ergon tou laou* in which God's people are in a glorious partnership. Partnership with the angels in worship and service to

the world is a thoroughly biblical synergism which, on the one hand, preserves the church from despair as it sees the huge task of claiming the world for God and his saving justice. On the other hand, it is a sobering reminder to the church that it alone does not and cannot fight all God's battles. Pride and despair are dispelled as we link hands with the celestial world.

Secondly, the meeting in worship of human and angelic 'holy ones' is part of a larger cosmic adoration. The groaning of creation is not the only voice we should hear. Worship of the triune God should also open our ears to nature's own song of adoration. So there is a vital ecological facet to Christian worship as we celebrate the redemption of all things, and look in hope for their final restoration. Our western tradition has tended to stress the distance between the city of this world and the city of God, between this aeon and the age to come. Perhaps we need to recapture what the eastern tradition has managed to preserve: a sense for the unity God's world, whereby the sacramental mystery is a *symbolon* of transforming grace on a cosmic scale.

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