

OUR SPIRITUAL PROTECTORS

Adapted from a Sermon by Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh

He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways (Psalm 91:11).

From the earliest moments of our life, we are constantly attended by invisible protectors—our guardian angels. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church teaches us that one of the important uses angels serve is to be with people. We are told that, “angels from each society are sent to people to watch over them and to lead them away from evil affections and consequent thoughts, and to inspire them with good affections ...” (*Heaven and Hell* 391). We are influenced in life by evil spirits too, who vie for the power to control us. In this sense, it is true that people can be known by the company they keep—the spiritual company! Indeed, after death, a person is permanently joined with a society of spirits, in heaven or in hell, whose association he has chosen during his life.

These influences are essential because our life is not really within us, as we might suppose; it comes to us from the Lord by way of the spiritual world. We are “connected” with the Lord’s life through our association with spirits, much as our body is “connected” and directed in its actions by means of the mind. Indeed, we are taught that “Without communication with heaven and hell, a person could not live even a moment...” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5848f). Because of our inherited tendencies toward evil, we must have an association with hell if we are to survive at all. This can only be changed gradually and with our own choices.

Our associate spirits may be changed during our lifetime, and they are changed “according to a person’s states” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5851). At first, we often choose the company of spirits from hell because their ideas and loves match our selfish tendencies. At the same time, however, the Lord sends angels to disperse the influences of hell as far as possible, and to give us a desire to join with heavenly societies. Yet, this is always done with utmost respect for our freedom of choice. For the Lord “rules a person through his freedom and as far as possible withholds him from the freedom of thinking and willing evil” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5854).

The Heavenly Doctrine explains how this works: “Spirits...flow into what is thought and willed by a person, but angels into his *ends*... (*Arcana Coelestia* 5854 emphasis added). So the Lord’s leading comes through the angels into the ends or purposes of our lives. And the influence of ends or goals enters more deeply into us than the influence of what we think and will. That is why the presence of the angels has a more powerful effect on us than the presence of evil spirits. Angels “inspire charity and faith, and...observe in what direction the person’s delights turn, and in so far as they can, without interfering with the person’s freedom, moderate them and bend them to good... Infernal spirits continually attack, and the angels protect; such is the order” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5992).

The Lord never fails to do His part in providing for our protection and salvation. The angels, too, constantly seek this goal. Because of the love they have from the Lord, they perceive nothing more delightful and happy than to remove evils from a person and lead him to heaven (*Arcana Coelestia* 5992e). Our part in this is to cooperate with the Lord in the work to separate ourselves from the societies of hell and bring ourselves into conjunction with the societies of heaven.

First, we must learn to recognize and shun those intentions, thoughts, and deeds that invite the presence of evil spirits. The devils feed upon our states of evil. Whenever we allow ourselves to

break a commandment and feel delight in the pleasure of revenge, lust, deceit, or any other evil, it is an open invitation to a spirit from hell to attach himself to us. And the more our mind dwells upon the evils which attracted this spirit, the more closely he is joined to our life. Through such a spirit our mind can become a focus for an entire society of hell, and we become a slave to their evil loves. But if we shun those things that attract evil spirits, we can move toward true spiritual freedom.

We can also take steps to establish contact with heaven: prayer, reading the Word, and applying ourselves to useful work. When devoutly said, the Lord's prayer, especially, conjoins us with heaven, since it contains infinite truths from the Lord. Humbly approached, the Word is a treasury of connection. Each verse provides a focus for a society of heaven. As a person reads the natural sense, the angels see the spiritual sense, and this correspondence creates conjunction between heaven and earth. Finally, there is great protection in the love of useful work, for it holds us in the determination to be of service to others. All heaven is created from use and for use. The faithful performance of some study or business, therefore, places us in the order of heaven and in the sphere of the angels.

If we exercise our opportunities to shun evils as sins, to seek the Lord in His Word and through prayer, and devote ourselves to useful service to the neighbor, our faith in the Lord's merciful care and protection can be strengthened and confirmed. Even in times of temptation, we will realize that we are under the protection of the hosts of heaven. For the Lord does, indeed, send His angels to guard us from evil and lead us into good, to keep us in all our ways.