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The Review of the Doctoral Thesis  
**“Creation and Fall of Angels :  
The Angelology of Augustine of Hippo  
Facing the Manichaens and Platonists”**

written by Ovie Valentine Aghoghophia,  
supervised by Prof. Tomasz Stępień,

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**1. Introduction**

First of all, it must be said that the thesis written by Father Aghoghophia is simply very interesting. As I will develop later, I consider it to be too long and too broad in its scope, but still, it gives quite a good read. And this is already a very good quality. The topic of the dissertation deals with questions that are not at the centre of interest of contemporary academic theology. However, in course of his thesis, the Author raises the questions that certainly have always been in the centre of theological interest, such as the nature of evil, the grace, and free will. I particularly appreciate the discussion on the grace on the page 205 and following. The Author rightly grasps the importance of this issue for Augustine, for the theology of the sin, and consequently to his topic.

Then, and even more importantly, the angels and demons take an important place in the popular piety, therefore an academic study of them, as made by the Author, may be of quite a good use in a pastoral work. I think that some parts of the dissertation certainly deserve divulgation for such purposes.

**2. The construction and the scope of the dissertation**

The title of the dissertation signals already its very broad and ambitious scope. However, its content largely exceeds the limits posed by the title. The Author got

evidently excited by his research (which is, of course, a very good thing), and managed to write something that should be rather called "Everything that we know about the angels and demons from Augustine". On one hand, I may be wrong about "everything", but on the other hand, it certainly is not only "the creation and fall of the angels", but at least "the creation, nature, function and fall of the angels". This criticism is tempered by the fact that the dissertation is generally logically constructed. Although the titles of the last two chapters, "The intellect and the will of the angels", and "Angelic guardianship and demonic assaults" seem to have little in common with the title of the dissertation, their subchapters eventually lead us to the content which is very well connected to the main questions of the thesis.

Up to this point, I tried to evaluate the conformity of the content with the main part of the title of the thesis. As far as the subtitle goes, the question is even more complicated. The first chapter of the dissertation gives us a very neat and useful summary on the Manichaeic, Platonist, and Biblical views on the creation and the angels. However, in the next chapters of the thesis, the Author concentrates on referring the views of Augustine. The reference to his adversaries is of course included quite often, but I think that not consistently and often enough to fully justify the "facing the Manichaeans and Platonists" aspect of the title of the thesis.

On the positive side, it must be said that the Author "knows his Augustine" well enough. It is sometimes a bit difficult to know what is the personal opinion of the Author, and what of Augustine, since the teaching of the Bishop of Hippo becomes the real backbone of the dissertation in question. However, it becomes sometimes difficult to decide whether the thesis deals mainly with the history of theology or with theology. To put it more clearly: is the Author interested primarily in what Augustine thought about the angels, as the title of the thesis suggests, or is the Author trying to get as much knowledge about the angels as possible, basing himself on Augustine?

This problem becomes particularly clear in the long conclusion of the thesis (pp. 296-322). This last part is not annotated, and therefore seems to contain the most personal views, of the Author and of Augustine. The certitude with which they have been pronounced may be a bit disconcerting, e.g.:

1. "The thesis also produced fruitful results regarding the indispensable role played by angels in Christ's soteriological actions" (p. 314). Firstly, I am not sure if the thesis has proven that Augustine thought so, and secondly, even

if the answer is positive, can we be sure that this role was really “indispensable”?

2. “Ultimately, this study came to the belief that God will unveil to the saints the precise nature of this divine chastisement” (p. 320). It is good that “belief”, and not “knowledge” is invoked here, but still: is it the view of Augustine or the Author?
3. “This thesis posited that the degrees of grace bestowed upon the angels varied, with the fallen angels receiving less grace compared to those destined to experience the beatific vision”. Actually, I gather this is the view of Augustine, not of “the thesis”.

Encouraged by the broad scope of the thesis, already exceeding its title, I think that still two aspects would deserve further treating, although neither of them is immediately within the declared subject. The first one would be the analysis of how much St Thomas Aquinas (*Doctor Angelicus!*) drew from Augustine. Aquinas appears episodically on the cards of this thesis, especially in the fragments relating to the “vespertine knowledge”, but it would be interesting to see in a more detailed way what is the relation between his views and Augustine’s.

Secondly, although a whole chapter of the thesis is entitled “Angelic Guardianship and Demonic Assaults”, not much is said about the Guardian Angels. Obviously, Augustine does provide very scarce information on them (I found only mention, and not a very definite one, on the p. 114 of the thesis), but given the broad scope of the angelological interest of the Author, a reflection on the development of the Catholic devotion seems a very promising area of research.

### **3. Methodological aspects**

The main source for the dissertation consists of the Augustinian texts. The Author draws mainly from *De ciuitate Dei*, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* and *De Genesi ad litteram*, but other texts of the Bishop of Hippo are also used. This should be stressed, because it is not obvious at the first glance, as the references to Augustine are put inline, as opposed to other references, which are in the footnotes. The Author enumerates the critical editions of the text at the beginning of the thesis, and the texts of Augustine are referred to in a correct way.

The Manichaeic, Platonic, and Neo-Platonic texts should be also among the main sources of the thesis, and actually they are, especially the works of Plotinus and Porphyry, although this results only from the footnotes, not from the bibliography.

The secondary literature used in this thesis makes this reviewer slightly perplexed. It is a very eclectic gathering of entries of different scholar value. Characteristically, few monographs are cited, for example none of the most important biographies of Augustine is referred to (neither Peter Brown, nor Serge Lancel, nor James O'Donnell). On the other hand, a plethora of articles is cited. Their range gives the impression that the research was done via internet resources alone, and not in the physical libraries. It is not an objection in itself, because the references are generally very relevant to the topic. However, the range of the sources cited exceeds the expertise of this reviewer. To give an example, we open the thesis at the page 226, dealing mainly with Manichaeism. I can easily appreciate the scholarly value of *The Cambridge companion to early Greek philosophy* and of *Mani in Dublin*, the post-conference collection of essays published by Brill. On the other hand, I have no means to assess the value and the relevance of "The languages of Southeastern Asia" from *The Journal of Asian Studies* (1943). We find even more entertaining examples on the page 268, where the Author follows in a correct way the reasoning of Augustine presented in *The City of God*. However, the footnotes refer us to following papers: "Fyodor Dostoyevski, Walker Percy and the demonic self", "Witch Trials in Medieval Europe", and, most astoundingly, "Dan Brown's Angels and Demons: A narrative or procedure text?". As much as I would be tempted to read all those papers, I am not convinced they lend any scholarly gravity to the exposition of the Author, which, I repeat, is generally correct.

To conclude this section, a lot of valuable papers from respected patristic, historical, and theological journals (*Augustiniana*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*<sup>1</sup>, and so on) have been cited. The error may lie rather in the unnecessary reference to the papers from beyond this range. On the other hand, it is refreshing to see that authors working on sociology, ethnology, anthropology, and similar issues may have some relation to Augustine. Still, some more complete interaction with the current scholarship on Augustine would be welcome. Even the discussion of the

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<sup>1</sup> By the way, the journals are sometimes cited with small errors, especially regarding the capitalization of the names. Similarly, the Author is not decided whether to cite Augustine's works by their English or Latin titles (e.g. pp.91-92). There is also some problem with the numeration of the footnotes on the pp. 41-44.

literature in the introduction offers rather a summary of some works (mainly other PhD dissertations), and not a thorough survey of the scholarship on the topic.

#### 4. Other issues

P. 49: "During our discussion, Augustine will make that clear to us that God created the angels in Genesis". The reference here is again only to some obscure paper, and I am not sure that the following text justifies this statement.

P. 121. What does it mean that "the goodness of the angels is communal"?

P. 225. The "Neoplatonists seldom ever made a distinction between good and wicked angels". I cannot really see how the Neoplatonists would refer to the angels in the Biblical meaning at all. And the daemons, to which the Author refer here, do not have to be connected to the angels.

P. 241. I know that Sermon 225 is entitled "Ad infantes" in the *Patrologia Latina* edition, but I think that neophytes, not children were the actual hearers of it.

#### 5. Conclusion

On p. 321 the Author stated that "this study allowed for a profound deepening of my theological understanding. The complex concepts explored, such as the nature of evil, free will, grace, and angelic roles, provide a more nuanced comprehension of theological principles. Moreover, this academic adventure fostered my critical thinking skill on the subject matters treated." I am sure it did, and it can be seen through the thesis. The Author may have been getting sometimes over-excited on the issues he was treating, and the ambition to say "everything" about the angels hindered the compactness of the thesis, but the results show that he was well prepared to tackle this complicated topic, which required an adequate theological, philosophical, and exegetical knowledge. There is also no doubt that the work is the result of the individual academic endeavour by the Author. Finally, the work is original, and constitutes an interesting contribution to the theological reflection on the angels.

Therefore, I am fully convinced that the dissertation of Rev. Ovie Valentine Aghoghophia fulfills all the requirements posited by the Article 187 of the 2018 Law on the Higher Education (*Dz.U. 2023, poz. 742*) and I propose allowing him to proceed to further steps towards the achievement of the doctoral degree.

*ks. S. Adamiale*

Toruń, 22 January 2024