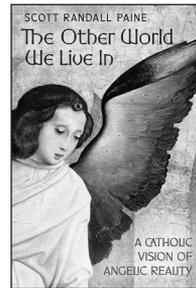


The Other World We Live In

By Scott Randall Paine

Angelico Press Brooklyn, NY (2021)

Reviewed by Brian Welter



Brazil-based Father Scott Paine, who teaches philosophy and religion, discusses good and evil angels, their natures and roles in creation and redemption, and why we should pay keen attention to them. He addresses moral theology, revelation, the Bible's description of angels, and the nature of good and evil. While the author leaves out sensationalist cases of possession by demonic angels, his discussion of the nature of angels and virtue and vice is fascinating.

The author outlines the connection of angels to humans, and the vital role of angels in God's salvation plan. God, angels, and humans are persons. This similar nature allows for interaction among angels and humans, and a certain amount of understanding. The author unfortunately leaves out a detailed discussion of being, so readers are left guessing how parallels in our nature of being play a role in this connection.

One reason this is a page-turner is that Paine is no romantic, but offers a sober assessment of angels. He chides modern Christians for forgetting the central role of angels in creation, reminding us that angels are “the very first creatures of God, and just as integral to the whole of creation as are human beings and the orders of material reality, both inorganic and living” (11).

A recurring theme of the book is trial. God tested the angels by forcing them to decide if they would serve him or not. He likewise forces humans to continually face trials. In other words, life is a spiritual struggle, even a spiritual war. God demands our full adherence in a world with countless distractions and possibilities to turn away from him and to commit evil. This perspective of angels, God, and salvation does not shy away from portraying God as a strict master and judge, and not merely a dispenser of grace. Grace is not cheap.

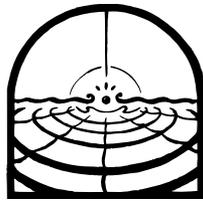
The author describes the world as “two camps of battle.” We are participating in this war whether we want to or not and whether we think we are or not. As part of this reality, he challenges readers to do away with “the tendency to imagine spirits as wispy and homogeneous,” or to equate “spiritual” with “goodness” (14). Such erroneous thinking can lead to Gnosticism, which often downgrades the material and leads to a false understanding of the nature of the spiritual battle. It is not the material world that is evil. God created it, so it is good. Fallen human nature and the demonic world are the sources of evil.

Sin, evil, and hell are the prices for human and angelic freedom. The nature of freedom means that trial strengthens the will and makes us wiser. The author sees an eschatological aspect to these daily struggles we all face, because “the final resolution of the conflict of sin also involves an ordering of angel and material cosmos to Christ” (24). This seems to call us to a life of asceticism, though the author unfortunately fails to develop this fully.

The author addresses the theme of freedom repeatedly. The angels’ free choice of whether to serve God or not has been profoundly significant to all of the cosmos, including our own lives. By the end of the book, readers will have a much stronger and clearer appreciation of why this is so.

While Paine does not refer to many theologians, he does turn to the teachings of the fifth-century Christian Syrian mystic and Neoplatonist,

To read the balance of this article, please subscribe to this volume.



SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

www.sacredweb.com