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Maria Regina: Presidential Address

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MARIA REGINA: PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Before I begin my brief remarks, I want to take the opportunity to express, in my own name and that of the members of the Society, admiration and encouragement to Bishop Vaughan, our Episcopal Moderator, for his heroic efforts on behalf of the unborn. As we are all aware, Bishop Vaughan, as a participant in *Operation Rescue*, has now been arrested twice as he and others have protested the immoral laws which permit abortions in our country. We promise him and the movement our heartfelt prayers.

The remarks which follow are not in the way of being a formal paper. They require further thought and scholarly development. I would like them to be viewed simply as an effort, as we near the end of this year dedicated to Mary, to recognize again—with deep gratitude—her role in our lives.

I want to speak of the First Lady and the stars, not because Mrs. Reagan's consultation of an astrologer has any great significance in itself but rather because it brings to my mind certain theological positions of the Fathers of the Church and of St. Thomas Aquinas which are, for all practical purposes, completely overlooked in current theological speculation.

St. Thomas Aquinas, as you all know, had what many these days would consider a pre-scientific view of the structure and ordering of the material universe. Nowhere, perhaps, can his ideas in this area be seen more clearly than in his treatment of the role of the angels in respect to created reality as he deals with this in questions 110-111 of the *Summa* (Part I). There, working from the thought of the Fathers of the Church—particularly Augustine, Damascene, John Chrysostom and, of course, pseudo-Dionysius—Thomas teaches the following:

1. All corporeal creation is ruled through the angels. Material reality indeed exhibits its own normal behavior, acting, as we would say, according to the laws of nature. Nonetheless, says Aquinas, "it is characteristic of material things not to act unless acted upon. Thus they must be acted upon by non-material beings" (q.110, a.1c and ad 1).

2. Being of a higher order of causality, the angels can cause material realities to move themselves (110, 2, ad 2).

3. The higher bodies are moved locally by the spiritual substances, i.e., angels (110, 3c).

4. Since Providence disposes lower things to be subject to the influence of higher things, so men, being of a lower order than the angels, receive enlightenment from the angels. As higher minds they are able to fortify our minds, just as we can be strengthened by the opinion of one more intelligent than we are. They are also able to teach things to us through sense knowledge (111, 1c).

5. The angels are able to induce changes in our wills through the persuasive power they have to act on us through the senses, i.e., by using sense objects or our own emotions to sway us (111, 2,c).

6. Angels, whether good or bad, can change the human imagination by their own natural power through the ability they have to act upon us through the senses (111, 3c).

These theses of St. Thomas, outdated as they may appear, form an integral part of his view of the universe. It is a view which intimately relates all the aspects of the Creator's work. For Thomas, all created reality is truly a *cosmos*, i.e., something of beauty and harmony, the overall beauty arising from the proper functioning of all the parts or aspects. It is a view which maintains a hierarchical structure for the universe—the lesser aspects of creation subordinate to and even, in some sense, dependent on the higher. Matter is ordered to life, life to intelligence and will, intelligence and will to mutual enrichment and to praise of the Creator. It is a view which sees all of creation—angelic, human, sentient, material—as sharing a common history as well as a common destiny and bound together by truly

causal relationships. Matter acts on and serves spirit; intelligent beings, for good or evil, act upon one another. Nothing is simply a monad, and all willed acts of freedom are co-causal.

Intimately connected with his general outlook on the nature of the cosmos is Thomas' view of the nature of secondary causality. For him, it is a matter of faith that through the angels God administers the lower orders of creation. Indeed, he writes: "[To say that the angels do not have a knowledge of particular things] derogates from the Christian faith which holds that things below them are administered through the angels" (I, q. 57, 2c). This assertion of faith is, for Aquinas, supported by reason, as seen already in the pagan philosophers who "taught that the angels move the heavenly bodies, and that they move them according to understanding and will" (I; q. 57, 1c).

M. J. Charlesworth, commenting on these views, writes:

For St. Thomas, following Aristotle's metaphysical astronomy, the heavenly bodies have a special status and sublunary bodies are subordinated to and influenced by them. To this small extent, astrology has something to it, for if one could know the dispositions of the heavenly bodies one could in principle also know the dispositions of the sublunary bodies. In the case of human beings, however, any kind of astral determinism and astrological prediction of human actions is firmly rejected. Man's body can to some extent, like other material bodies, be influenced by the heavenly bodies, but his intellectual soul is non-material, since intellect and will are not bodily functions dependent (as are the sense powers) on physical organs, and so escape any astral influences.¹

He probably would more accurately have reflected St. Thomas' view had he said that human intellect and will escape any *direct* astral influences.

¹St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (60 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 15: xv-xvi (M.J. Charlesworth edited volume 15).

Now my point in all this is not to defend the superstitious practices of astrology. However, the recent overblown fuss in the media occasioned by Donald Regan's revelations about Mrs. Reagan's astrological interests can remind us of a truth. Astrological speculations persist through human history, because they are based on a truth inadequately perceived by untold millions of people and too quickly disdained by theologians. That truth—affirmed by the classic philosophers, the Fathers of the Church and by Aquinas—is this: the system of inter-causal, although non-determinative, relationships in the universe is much wider and deeper than an empiricist science (whether that empiricism belongs to the natural sciences or to theology) can deal with adequately. In fact, reality (visible and invisible) acts upon us and moves us in ways which are no less potent for the fact that they are not sensibly perceived.

In his earlier writings, Karl Rahner still defended part of this truth as it pertained to angels. He wrote:

Wherever in nature and history instances of order, structure and meaningful patterns emerge which—at least conjecturally and when envisaged without preconceptions—do not appear to be purely mechanical, material composition “from below” nor to be planned and produced freely by men, and when such meaningful patterns in nature and history exhibit even for us at least traces of non-human intelligence and dynamism, it is meaningful to regard these as grounded on and guided by such “principles.” For it is methodologically false always immediately to regard such complex, large-scale configurations in nature (cf. Rev 16:5 etc.) and history (“angels of the nations”: Dan 10:13, 20 f.) as direct expressions of the divine mind, particularly since the antagonism of such large-scale units at least *in history* indubitably points in the first place rather to antagonistic cosmic “principalities and powers.”²

²K. Rahner, “Angel” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. by K. Rahner *et al.* (6 vols.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:28. Cf., as regards the influence of angels on individuals, the words of Michael Seemann in “Los angeles en la obra salvadora de Dios,” in *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, tome II, Ediciones Cristiandad (Madrid, 1970), 1093.

Although written as didactic fiction, the works of C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*, offer insights on the governing and tutelary role of the angels in the universe which are quite superior to Fr. Rahner's and fully in harmony with the views of Aquinas. All such views are thought to stumble, of course, against a mechanistic view of the so-called "natural order" of things. "The heavenly bodies move themselves," we say, "and do so according to the laws of nature, laws implanted in things by God Himself." And we make such assertions, at times, almost as if the laws of matter and anti-matter, gravity, centripetal and centrifugal force, the "big bang," the expanding universe, "black holes," the "string theory" and quantum physics were self-evident and adequately understood truths! If angels were ever needed to "fill the gaps" in empirical science's efforts to explain the motion of the universe, then one must assert that there are still plenty of gaps which they can fill. However, Aquinas' angelology is not a "God-of-the-gaps" theology. It is rather a profound reflection on the nature of secondary, subordinate and interrelated material and spiritual causes, each functioning on its own level, each coordinated in such a way as to be enriched in its own causality by its very dependence on higher causes, each, on its own level, an aspect of the "natural laws."

And so, I come finally to my point: the First Lady and the stars, by which I mean the Star of the Sea, she who, in her present governing and tutelary role in the universe, is Queen of those who govern the stars.

I have the impression that when we call Mary Queen of the Universe we are normally using an honorific title as a way of expressing her dignity—that and no more. It is as if she were one who reigns but does not rule. And we do this for various reasons, I think. Firstly, because we tend to think that in heaven there is nothing to rule except in a moral sense. There, "God is all in all and everything takes care of itself" might express this attitude. As to her rule in the universe which is not yet formally part of heaven, we likewise tend to see no room for a role of governance and

tutelage except in some vague moral sense: she rules the hearts of the faithful and teaches by example.

The role of the angels in the universe, as well as their functions in the Church and in the final Judgment (cf. Mt. 13:39-49), and the role of the Apostles who "from their place in heaven guide us still" (Preface II of the Mass of Apostles) and who will sit on thrones sharing in the judgment (cf. Mt. 19:28) are indications sufficient to tell us that a merely moral role of governance and tutelage is not sufficient to express what is meant when we address Mary as Queen of Angels, Queen of Apostles, Queen of All. God has given His intelligent creatures a great role in the governance of the universe. It is sufficient to consider the role that mankind has been given and exercises over nature to confirm this truth. We are co-causes, under and with God, even in the process of giving life, to say nothing of such lesser things as splitting the atom even while we begin the exploration and domination of the solar system. Indeed, so widespread is our power as secondary causes that God does not will to withdraw such powers from us even when they are shockingly abused.

Now there is no warrant in Revelation which allows us to entertain the idea that once our time on earth is temporarily ended (temporarily, in light of the transformed heaven and earth we shall inhabit at the end of this order which is passing away), our powers as secondary and real causes in creation will cease. Indeed Revelation, as seen in the examples cited, gives us adequate reason to conclude the opposite. God intends to enrich and render more effective our roles as secondary causes in the universe. Eternal life is not passivity; it is the rest of satisfying creativity. The angels *work* without labor and without any interruption of the joy which is theirs in beholding God. So, too, Our Lady Queen. Her various apparitions here on earth are but indications, momentary manifestations, of that role of governing and teaching, of acting on and causing good in all that is placed below her in the order of creation—and that includes everything except her Son, Who Himself, for a time, was made a little less than the angels (cf. Ps. 8:5).

Being Mother of God and Queen of All, Mary's role in governing and teaching is universal and operates on a level which is higher and more effective than any lower causes, even the Sacraments of the Church, the Eucharist excepted. When an angel moves the bodies of the material universe, even while doing so through the less potent forces in nature itself, it is she who with her wider and more potent causality moves the angels; while the Apostles govern and teach the Church even now from heaven with the effective powers given them, it is with powers secondary to her causality; when a priest consecrates with the powers given to him at ordination, it is she who acts as causal power above and through him. All that Aquinas said of the role of angels is true in a higher and more powerful way of her:

1. All corporeal creation is ruled through her.
2. Being of a higher order of causality, she can cause material realities to change themselves (110, 2, ad 2).
3. The higher bodies are moved locally by her.
4. Since Providence disposes lower things to be subject to the influence of higher things, so we humans, being of a lower order than she, receive enlightenment from her. As a higher mind she fortifies our minds, just as we can be strengthened by the opinion of one more intelligent than we. So also is she able to teach things to us through sense knowledge (111, 1c).
5. She is able to induce changes in our wills through the persuasive power she has to act on us through the senses, i.e., by using sense objects or our own emotions to sway us (111, 2c).
6. Angels, whether good or bad, can change the human imagination by their own natural power through the ability they have to act upon us through the senses (111, 3c), so, too, can she.

And all this she can and does do on her own initiative, by truly human and free acts of her own will. It is a will, of course, now—as it has always been—in total conformity with the will of God, but a will, which—like the human will of her Son—is more independent and *sui juris* for that conformity.

It is this powerful gentleness we salute, as this year named in her honor draws to a close:

Be thou then, O thou dear
 Mother, my atmosphere;
 My happier world, wherein
 To wend and meet no sin;
 Above me, round me lie
 Fronting my froward eye
 With sweet and scarless sky;
 Stir in my ears, speak there
 of God's love, O live air,
 Of patience, penance, prayer:
 World-mothering air, air wild,
 Wound with thee, in thee isled,
 Fold home, fast fold thy child.³

Salve, Regina! Mater!

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³Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe," ll. 114-126, in *A Hopkins Reader*, ed. by John Pick (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1966), 73.