

HOW DO WE LOOK TO ANGELS?

Excerpts from a sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

Do you know what you look like? You may have a mirror in the bathroom and one in the hall and one in the living room. We are accustomed to seeing our faces in a mirror. But do we feel we really know what we look like? We may look at a photograph of ourselves with real curiosity. It is sometimes surprising to see a film or video in which we participate. “Do I really look like that?” we might ask someone else to tell us. “Do I move and act like that?”

It is particularly interesting to see something we are familiar with from an entirely different angle. If there is an aerial photograph of our neighborhood, we might search in it for our house or school, and perhaps look with fascination at the routes we regularly walk. And that reference to the path we walk is of interest, because when we are viewed in the light of heaven, it is as if we are taking certain paths or ways (see *Heaven and Hell* 534). Sometimes, although we are not moving physically, we walk in the valley of shadow, and sometimes, although there may be confusion and turmoil around us, we walk beside still waters.

There is a teaching in *Heaven and Hell* 131 about how we look to angels. It says that when we are good we are regarded by angels as beautiful, and when we are into evil, we appear ugly. This is in a chapter on the light of heaven. We are told that when that light shines on people, they appear as they really are.

For example, we may think that the affections we experience and the ideas in our minds are simple. But they are wonderfully complex. Once, in the spiritual world, some doubted how much was contained within a single idea. The idea was then opened up for them so far that they seemed to see “a universe leading to the Lord” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4946). And each idea an individual has is, in a way, a picture of that individual. We read,

The quality of a spirit can be known in the other life from one single idea of his thought. Indeed, angels have from the Lord the power of knowing at once when they but look upon anyone, what his character is.... It is therefore evident that every single idea and every single affection of a person...is an image of him and a likeness of him (*Arcana Coelestia* 803).

As we make our choices from day to day, it can make a great difference to realize how unpleasant—in the sight of heaven—some of the things are that we might be inclined to indulge in. What a difference, when we realize how beautiful life is to behold when we do not harm others but wish them well! *Arcana Coelestia* 2363 suggests an exercise to help us think about this:

So that anyone may recognize the nature of...the life of self-love and love of the world, or what amounts to the same, the life that goes with arrogance, greed, envy, hatred, revenge, ruthlessness, and adultery, let him...depict for himself some of these evils. Or, if he is able, let him paint a picture that accords with the

ideas he can get of it from experience, knowledge, and reason. He will, in that case see...how shocking those evils are and that they are devilish forms with nothing human in them.... But, on the other hand, if he depicts love and charity for himself...he will see, insofar as his drawing or portrayal is accurate, that it is an angelic form full of blessed and beautiful things, which has what is heavenly and Divine within it.

Try this for yourself. Paint a mental picture, if you can, of some of the negative feelings that can motivate us, such as revenge or pride. What do they look like? Now think of a picture of friendship or compassion. What do they look like? Remember, when we are in evil, we appear ugly, but when we are in good the angels regard us as beautiful. Thus, people who make it part of their lives to shun evils as sins against God “appear in heaven before the angels as beautiful human beings, and partners and companions of the angels” (*Divine Providence* 121).