

The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons and the Heavenly Realm

edited by Anthony N.S. Lane.

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reviewed by Johan D.Tangelder.

How real is the unseen world? Is the devil authentic or a fiction of imagination? Should Christians believe in the existence of “territorial spirits,” which resist the coming of God’s Kingdom, and can, in prayer, be identified and “bound” in such a way that inroads can be made in “Satan’s territory?” Should pastors and counsellors take into consideration the role of the demonic in believers with emotional problems? Can we know anything about angels? Are they a created reality? Does each human being have a guardian angel?

Recent studies reveal a marked swing away from materialism. New Agers are fascinated by the unseen world. They do not regard angels as speculation and view witchcraft as a benign spiritual reality. Today, angels are back, but they have a cuddly appearance. Witchcraft is widely practised. And some people even talk again about evil spirits and demon possession.

Scripture places the reality of angels and Satan beyond doubt. The Bible talks specifically about them in many numerous passages. Hence, in our time a Christian book on angels and demons is not a luxury but a necessity. The authors of the *Unseen World* attempt to develop an angelology and a perspective on demonology which address current spiritual questions. The first two chapters relate to angels. Stephen F. Noll offers a historical survey of angelology, starting with Philo of Alexandria (died c. AD 45) to the contemporary influential scholar Walter Wink. Lawrence Osborn discusses Karl Barth’s view on angels as well as contemporary thinkers. The next two chapters focus on heaven. Celia Deane-Drummond expounds the German theologian Moltmann’s position on heaven. Richard Sturch discusses whether heaven is a created reality and whether there is progress in heaven. In the next five chapters various scholars try to interpret the existence and the reality of demons. The final chapter authored by

Thomas Nobles summarises the preceding arguments. And to outline briefly a clear Christian doctrine on the spirit world, he takes the Trinitarian structure of the Nicene Creed as his guide.

The *Unseen World* does not provide a uniform perspective. Although it is an important scholarly work, I found some chapters disappointing, even frustrating, others are helpful and insightful. A grounding in theology, philosophy, and Greek is a requirement for the reader. Since we live in a multicultural society with its many different spiritualities, pastors and theological students should read the book to become acquainted with the latest discussions on angels and demons. After I finished reading it, I wondered when someone will take up the challenge and write a more readable work on the subject from a Biblical Reformed confessional viewpoint.