THE GLORIOUS COMPANY OF THE ANGELS

In Commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Chapel
of the Resurrection -- Valparaiso University,
Valparaiso, Indiana

TEXT: Hebrews 1: 6-7: When he bringeth in the first-begotten into
the world, he saith, "And let all the angels of God worship him."
And the angels he saith, "Who makes his angels spirits, and his
ministers a flame of fire."

I am certain that during the past two years all of us have looked at
the strangest heresy of our apostate age -- the God is dead theology.
It is a somewhat belated attempt to rule the God of Redemption, history
and life out of existence. What we do in this chapel day after day is
totally irrelevant and completely out of date.

It is not my purpose to talk about the God is dead heresy this morning.
I would, however, like to raise the question which has seldom if ever
been aired: If God is dead, what happens to the hierarchy of heaven --
the angels, the Cherubim and Seraphim, Michael and Gabriel, and all
the sentinels of praise? Obviously they are out of a job! They are
supposed to serve and sing. What do they do when there is nobody to
serve and nothing to sing about?

The problem is considered in a charming little essay in one of our post
modern publications of September, 1969. Much of its significance lies
in the identity of the journal where the article appeared; therefore
I would like to read a few paragraphs to you and ask you to guess
where this article came from. In part it reads: "The death of God
left the angels in a strange position. They were overtaken suddenly
by a fundamental question. One can attempt to imagine the moment. How did they look at the instant the question invaded them, flooding the angelic consciousness, taking hold with terrifying force? The question was: 'What are angels?'

"New to questioning, unaccustomed to terror, unskilled in aloneness, the angels wept.... We may further assume some attempt was made at self-definition by function. An angel is what he does.... After their lamentation had gone on for hundreds and hundreds of whatever the angels use for time -- one angel proposed that Lamentation be the function of angels eternally as adoration was formerly!.... There was considerable discussion and finally the author closes with the following: "I saw a famous angel on television; his garments glistened as if with light. He talked about the situation of angels now. Angels, he said, are like men in some ways. The problem of adoration is felt to be central. He said that for a time the angels had tried adoring each other as we do, but had found it finally not enough. They are continuing to search for a new principle."

Have you guessed the source of these words? They appeared first in _The New Yorker_, the most sophisticated reflection of an unsophisticated age.

At this point you may well ask: "What does all this, this fantasy of lonely, bewildered angels, have to do with the tenth anniversary of the dedication of our chapel?" The answer is clear. There were several purposes in the minds and hearts of the men and women who helped build this chapel a decade ago. First and foremost was to build here a monument to the living God, and an insistent reminder that life is more than laughter and tears, buying and selling, being born and dying -- that there is a view of life which soars above the Angst of our time.
and which our students should see before they, too, join the tearing world outside the door of this chapel.

And here is where the angels come. In this chapel we worship our Lord and Christ as Savior and Redeemer. We worship Him also as Lord of the angels, of all principalities and powers, Ruler of the spirits, the flames of fire.

Since Gethsemane and Calvary Jesus Christ is never alone. He always comes with his legions of angels, or at least as many as He needs for the occasion. We twentieth century people really do not believe that, and I cannot prove it by the scientific method. All I can say is that one very dark evening I saw one of our students here in prayer. She seemed to be alone, but I do not think she was. On November 22, 1963, two thousand of us came to this chapel at about two o'clock in the afternoon. We were brought here by the news of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In this chapel there have been ten Christmas vespers attended by about two thousand of us each year. We remembered the song of the angels singing on earth for the first time and possibly the last. Were none of the angels with us on those silent and holy nights? I believe that they were here.

The glorious company of the angels! I can hear one of the other of us saying: "This time you have widened the credibility gap too far. We are children of the twentieth century! Angels are for our grandmothers or our little brothers and sisters, perhaps on Christmas Eve, but not for me. I am sophisticated and intelligent. This is an age of hard facts, of realism, of good common sense."

And so, God pity us -- we do not hear or see the angels any more. And without them life, light and courage grow dim and dark. Many years ago
the prophet Zechariah saw in a vision the ordination of the High Priest Joshua before the throne of the Most High. Surrounded by all the legions of angels the young High Priest heard the voice of God asking him to give himself, body, mind and soul, to the service of God. As Joshua wondered what his reward for all that would be, suddenly God gives him the promise: "If thou wilt follow my statutes, keep my judgments, then I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." Joshua turned -- and there they were -- the shining hosts of Heaven standing in silent serried ranks above him. He saw the angels and he knew that he had been given a place among them as they stood there. We can see them, too, but only on the way from the empty cross and the open tomb and then to the place whence they came.

The glorious company of the angels! When this chapel was built more than a decade ago all who had anything to do with it -- designers, architects, planners, generous donors, friends -- all had a definite purpose expressed in various ways. This chapel was to be a monument to Jesus Christ. It was to say that we, so late in time, still cling to the God of Grace, Redemption and Sanctification. It was to tell the world of our continuing need for the eternal, the awareness of the world above us, sure that our laboratories and libraries, our classrooms and dormitories, were not enough. This chapel began to call us into the years that lie before us. So -- if at some dim and distant time we here might have a faculty, students and administration who no longer believe in the purposes of this chapel, it will still be necessary for them to come to terms with what this chapel represents. They can never quite get away from this silent witness to our faith.
I have been given the privilege this morning to make two announcements concerning this chapel and its program for the years that lie ahead. First, under the leadership of the Dean and his staff we hope to publish regularly a Journal of the Chapel, containing news, outstanding addresses and sermons preached by the Dean, the staff and other members of our faculty, and others who may be interested in this frontier encampment of the angels.

Secondly, after considerable discussion with the Board, the administration and especially the students who are aware of the temper and tone of our time it has been decided to name this chapel the Chapel of the Resurrection.

A few moments of thought will persuade you of the eternal rightness of this name, especially now toward the end of the second millennium of Christian history. We must swing the Resurrection Light beyond the dim shadows of the narrow grave to the thick darkness over the whole wide world. The resurrection was and is a sign of God's unshakeable will to make Jesus Christ the Lord of all. The concentrated might of arrogant evil is pathetic and impotent against the power that took Jesus Christ out of the grave. This is the conviction and certainty which makes the message of this chapel supremely and superbly strong and fearless. It causes it to burn undimmed in every believing heart and makes it possible for us to work for and see other "resurrections" in history -- the resurrection of the lonely and dispossessed --
of the down-trodden and forgotten. For all those who have known the modern conspiracy of death, for all who labor and are heavy-laden, for all these once children of time and now heirs of eternity, let this chapel say by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: You are no longer what you were. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

I should like to return to our theme for this morning. As I was thinking what I might say to you today I suddenly remembered that once, and only once, in all these years I talked in chapel about the angels. It was in October, 1945, we had played football against Ball State on that Saturday and some of our students were coming back to the campus in cars. A few hundred feet east of the crossing of Route 49 and Route 30 a drunken driver came down the wrong side of the divided highway. He struck the car in which our students were riding head on -- and before morning two of them were dead. Some of the remaining ones stayed in hospitals as long as two years before final recovery. A few days
later I tried to say in chapel what had really happened that Saturday evening. An angel stood before the Throne of God, white and still, and the voice of God came to him: "I have two children down there who are now about \( \frac{1}{2} \) ready to come home." And so there was another presence in that quiet emergency room that night, standing invisible among the doctors and nurses and sorrowing friends -- and at God's own moment the angel took their souls into His hands and began the long journey upward -- beyond the stars, beyond all worlds, beyond all time, to the land whose place we do not know. As the journey began in darkness -- the darkness of earth and sin and pain -- but as the angel flew there was a greater and greater light, brighter, whiter, stronger, until the whole universe was full of the searching majesty and mercy of God himself. And the angel came to the Throne of God with the souls of Marian and Theodora, and left them there. God looked at them, not for the first time. He had seen them and loved them from all eternity -- but they looked at God for the first time -- and what they saw we cannot imagine; but what they heard we know, the great choirs of angels of heaven chanting: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." And God bent down from His throne and wiped away all tears from their eyes. And they never again knew any more sorrow or pain, but only benediction and peace. I am content to leave them there as I was twenty years ago -- finally and still in the glorious company of the angels.