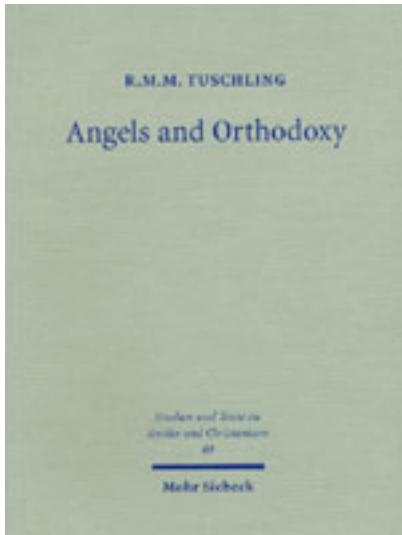


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**Tuschling, R. M. M.**

***Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian***

Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 40

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This book represents the unrevised text of Tuschling's Cambridge doctoral dissertation. It contains three major sections plus the normal introduction, conclusion, bibliography, and indices (index of references and of authors). The first chapter deals with "Syrian Sources and the History of Angelology." In the second chapter the "Theological Functions of Angels" are dealt with, while the third chapter focuses on "Angels and Human Prayers."

Tuschling starts his book by raising a very important issue: the relationship between a monotheistic God and angels. This is a delicate relationship indeed, since the angels are needed to reveal the presence of a transcendent God but may also threaten the unique position of the monotheistic God. This tension is made apparent throughout the book. Differing views of angels throughout the ages, and among different groups, clearly show the interaction between the view of God, the social situation, and various opinions about angels. These elements are interconnected and change as the respective situations change. It is important to note that Tuschling restricts his study to the geographical area of Palestine and Syria, since often one suspects that more evidence could have been supplied or more texts could have been discussed. This delineation was, however, necessitated by the specificity of the study.

The introduction provides a worthwhile read. Since the question of angels and their influence on orthodoxy has been a matter of both popular and scholarly debate, defining

the different terms of reference is important. Orthodoxy is defined as “a self-evaluation by Jews or Christians of themselves as true followers of the Law/of Jesus, and of others as false.” Tuschling also uses an inclusive definition of angels and gives a brief overview of trends in the study of angels.

In chapter 1 Tuschling provides a history of angelology. He discusses the pagan roots from the pre-second century B.C., looking at Canaanite and Mesopotamian influences. He traces the presence of the cherubim and seraphim in the Jewish religion back to the latter. The interaction between these two groups, for instance, as far as the exchange of the number of wings is concerned, is highlighted. During this period angels prove to be active on earth, conveying messages from God to people. Then Tuschling turns to the period starting with the second century up to the beginning of the Christian era. Angels are now presented as being more active in heaven, praising God and attending to him, as well as being ready for war within the heavenly realm. This leads to increased focus on higher and lower angels (cf. Persian cosmology), as well as to increased numbers and greater individualization. The first century and beyond are then discussed. Here Tuschling shows how different groups in Judaism held various opinions about angels and also used their views of angels as criteria for orthodoxy. No uniform angelology developed in the first four centuries. Paganism and Christianity are also given due attention. Tuschling illustrates how a monotheism where angels are indeed present and active should be regarded as orthodox as long as the angels do not challenge the status of God. Origen, for instance, developed a theology based on angels without any fear of being unorthodox. Angels indeed formed a key conceptual category for expressing theological thought.

A valuable and informative section is 1.3 under the title “Vocabulary,” where different words used of angelic beings are discussed. Concepts such as “messengers,” “holy ones,” “gods,” “spirits,” “watchers,” and “standing ones” are focused on, with a special section on “the angel of the Lord.” Here issues such as “hypostases,” “the great glory,” “principle angels,” and “archangels” come under the spotlight. An important criterion remains the degree of separation from God: the relationship to the deity should not threaten the monotheistic nature of God. The distinction between these heavenly figures and God should never be blurred or the relationship should not be weakened or separated, since angelology may then become dangerous to monotheism. However, as long as these figures do not encroach on God’s uniqueness, they are functionally valuable.

The theological function of angels is the topic of chapter 2. Three examples are given of how angels were integrated into theological reflection. The first group considered is the Qumran community, who saw themselves as an earthly counterpart to the “angelic priests of the heavenly temple.... This angelic life is part of the mapping or the whole cosmos in terms of the influence of angelic and demonic armies” (115). Their holiness and fitness to

worship God were measured against their likeness or identity with the angels. This served an apologetic function, justifying their secession from mainstream Judaism, yet it also confirmed their orthodox identity. Tuschling discusses texts that illustrate the intensity of the close overlap of the worship service of the angels and that of Qumran. Angels functioned as role models for correct behavior among the Qumran community. They are directed at humans, without leaving heaven or their primary task of worshiping God. Melchizedek also played an angelic role as a principal angel; 11Q13 even uses the Hebrew word *elohim*, normally translated as “God,” for Melchizedek. The second example is that of Origen, who borrows from the Platonic philosophy under the influence of Philo. Tuschling then moves on to the views of Ephrem of Nisibis, who function as his third example. In his theology angels function as role models and educators whom humans should imitate. Tuschling concludes that in all three examples angels advance the salvation of people, educating them. Their primary function in all three cases is, however, their liturgical praise of God. Through this liturgy humans are taken into heaven. The role of angels in all three these cases therefore suggests that there was indeed a rudimentary theology of angels available that was held in common. On that basis orthodoxy was formed.

Chapter 3 deals with angels and human prayers. Tuschling remarks: “The prominence of angels in both Jewish and early Christian daily prayer both presupposes and encourages awareness of their presence accompanying human worship” (177). He argues this point in detail from the relevant texts. He discusses the Qedushah and Sanctus, illustrating that human liturgy is shared by angels, especially when it comes to angelic praises. What is of special importance is the responsorial nature as part of their heavenly association. Tuschling also gives attention to sacred time, space, and beings. He points out that angels and priests have roles that are similar in many ways, inter alia, in mediating prayer. This makes prayer important: daily prayers should be observed correctly, since they mark the times in the day when the divine is accessed and people share in the perfect worship of angels.

Of course, these views on angels also reveal much about the transcendent God who is accessible through angelic worship but who is also immanent because that access is possible for humans.

This book is worth every minute one will spend reading it. The combination of the theological and historical dimensions gives a responsible view of angelology. In dictionaries one frequently gets syntheses, mixing the different aspects of angelology as if every aspect occurred throughout all of the historical periods. This view is corrected by this book. I must say that I would have enjoyed the book even more if Tuschling could have discussed the angelology of the New Testament in more detail. He restricts himself

geographically, but in any case, if you want to know more about angelology, do not pass this book by.