

Objection 1. It would seem that that fire will cleanse also the higher heavens. For it is written (Ps. 101:26,27): “The heavens are the works of Thy hands: they shall perish but Thou remainest.” Now the higher heavens also are the work of God’s hands. Therefore they also shall perish in the final burning of the world.

Objection 2. Further, it is written (2 Pet. 3:12): “The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat of fire.” Now the heavens that are distinct from the elements are the higher heavens, wherein the stars are fixed. Therefore it would seem that they also will be cleansed by that fire.

Objection 3. Further, the purpose of that fire will be to remove from bodies their indisposition to the perfection of glory. Now in the higher heaven we find this indisposition both as regards guilt, since the devil sinned there, and as regards natural deficiency, since a gloss on Rom. 8:22, “We know that every creature groaneth and is in labor even until now,” says: “All the elements fulfill their duty with labor: even as it is not without labor that the sun and moon travel their appointed course.” Therefore the higher heavens also will be cleansed by that fire.

On the contrary, “The heavenly bodies are not receptive of impressions from without”*.

Further, a gloss on 2 Thess. 1:8, “In a flame of fire giving vengeance,” says: “There will be in the world a fire that shall precede Him, and shall rise in the air to the same height as did the waters of the deluge.” But the waters of the deluge did not rise to the height of the higher heavens but only 15 cubits higher than the mountain summits (Gn. 7:20). Therefore the higher heavens will not be cleansed by that fire.

I answer that, The cleansing of the world will be for the purpose of removing from bodies the disposition contrary to the perfection of glory, and this perfection is the final consummation of the universe: and this disposition is to be found in all bodies, but differently in different bodies. For in some this indisposition regards something inherent to their substance: as in these lower bod-

ies which by being mixed together fall away from their own purity. In others this indisposition does not regard something inherent to their substance; as in the heavenly bodies, wherein nothing is to be found contrary to the final perfection of the universe, except movement which is the way to perfection, and this not any kind of movement, but only local movement, which changes nothing intrinsic to a thing, such as its substance, quantity, or quality, but only its place which is extrinsic to it. Consequently there is no need to take anything away from the substance of the higher heavens, but only to set its movement at rest. Now local movement is brought to rest not by the action of a counter agent, but by the mover ceasing to move; and therefore the heavenly bodies will not be cleansed, neither by fire nor by the action of any creature, but in lieu of being cleansed they will be set at rest by God’s will alone.

Reply to Objection 1. As Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xx, 18,24): “Those words of the psalm refer to the aerial heavens which will be cleansed by the fire of the final conflagration.” Or we may reply that if they refer also to the higher heavens, these are said to perish as regards their movement whereby now they are moved without cessation.

Reply to Objection 2. Peter explains himself to which heavens he refers. For before the words quoted, he had said (2 Pet. 3:5-7): “The heavens... first, and the earth... through water... perished... which... now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire unto the day of judgment.”† Therefore the heavens to be cleansed are those which before were cleansed by the waters of the deluge, namely the aerial heavens.

Reply to Objection 3. This labor and service of the creature, that Ambrose ascribes to the heavenly bodies, is nothing else than the successive movements whereby they are subject to time, and the lack of that final consummation which they will attain in the end. Nor did the empyrean heaven contract any stain from the sin of the demons, because they were expelled from that heaven as soon as they sinned.

* Cf. Sent. Philosop. ex Arist. collect. lit. c.—Among the works of Bede the sense is the same.

† The entire text differs somewhat from St. Thomas’s quotation; but