

FOR HEAVENS SAKE

"Well I must say, things seem to be falling apart" God the Father is clearly very irritated. "Things in heaven used to be simple and straightforward - but no more. The Godhead used to be respected, revered, but no more. Today, as far as those on earth are concerned, we are quite simply irrelevant. We seem to be perceived as just another quango - and everyone knows they are expensive and useless. It's enough to tempt me to send a pestilence to teach my errant children on earth a lesson. What do you think Michael?"

The senior Archangel looks pensive. He was practical and down to earth. But now he faced a dilemma. He needed to be frank with the Boss, but he didn't know how that would go down.

"Well, Boss" he said "you told us never to expect things to be easy, and by and large things haven't been too bad over the years. We have scored many successes so no-one can say we are past our "sell by" date. But things seem very different today. The Earthlings are facing some difficult and dangerous pressures. Perhaps we should try to help them more"

God the Father isn't impressed. "That's all very well, Michael, but I am getting increasingly cross with them. It is nothing but squabble, squabble, squabble. All over the earth there seems to be increasing turmoil. I put the blame on Lucifer. That Archangel is getting too big for his boots. Unfortunately, too many of the Earthlings fall for his soft soap and sweet talk. We must do something about it before it all gets too late." Michael tries to be reassuring. He points out that Gabriel is conducting a survey to find out what others in heaven think about the situation on earth.

God The Father isn't mollified. "All I know is that enough is enough. What we have got to do is to stop the rot here and now. Lucifer, too, has to be cut down to size. All this break down in law and order, the increases in crime and drug abuse, the immigration and terrorism problems and, above all, the petty-fogging small-mindedness and greed of the so-called political leaders on earth - all this shows how successful Lucifer is in getting others to his way of thinking. All he wants is to destroy. We must teach them all a lesson. After all I've already sent a few warning shots across the bows of the Earthlings - the odd major volcano here, earthquake there, floods in many places, new diseases rampant, one would have thought they would understand the

warning signs, but no. These days Earthlings think they have all the answers, they are the Bosses. We shall just have to show them who is the Big Boss!"

God The Father pauses, then says "Where is Gabriel, Michael? I should have thought he would be back by now".

Michael was a trifle defensive "You did put a lot on his plate, Boss. He should be back shortly - but you did ask him to canvass extensively, and to bring you the views of all your Angels and, also, to get you opinions from other planets. You particularly asked him to try to find out the opinions of the Bad Angels and what they are up to. It was a helluva task you set him."

As if on cue, in walks Gabriel - Michael feels a profound sense of relief. A thoroughly sophisticated Archangel, Gabriel can't hide his sanctimonious air. Asked by God the Father for his report he says "Well I can only say that being an Archangel today is no fun at all. You wouldn't believe it, all the grumbles I received. These covered everything you can think of.

Earthlings seem to have forgotten that here in heaven we have our problems too - being responsible for them. They consider they have only to ask and they will receive! I seriously believe that we should set up a complete retraining programme for them. Angels, too, certainly aren't what they used to be, that's for sure. But I can't say I blame them - they are just totally demoralised, and with reason"

God The Father is impatient. "Get on with it Gabriel. Let's hear what you found out. Start with the Good Angels".

"Yes Sir" Gabriel responds "I interviewed ten million Good Angels and found them pretty depressed. In spite of all their good and positive influences, it seems that their charges, the Earthlings don't respond and are depressed too. There are still many more good people on earth than bad, but they are finding things pretty difficult. They are frustrated - about simply everything - about their politicians, about their media, above all about the erosion of hope. They find they can't control their children. That they can't go out at night for fear of being mugged, and they are just plain scared - about what is happening to their environment, about the lack of security. It seems to them that, wherever they look, evil is triumphing over good - and that there is nothing they can do to reverse the process - their voices are never heard, all their efforts go unrecognised and are undervalued. And, all the time, the Bad Angels are undermining the efforts of your Good Angels. They can be very persuasive and, of course, they

are always holding out the benefits they can deliver, in terms of money, influence, and above all power. The Good Angels would dearly love you to give them some help ...they really need it" This is not what God The Father wishes to hear- "Gabriel, clearly this is no news to me - I am God The Father you know! Now tell me about the Bad Angels. What are they up to - this is the crux of the matter after all".

Gabriel is now distinctly nervous. He has bad news to impart and is uncertain as to how it will be received. He clears his throat and plunges in. "The Bad Angels were more forthcoming than I expected. But that's because they are so full of themselves and love to show off. I was able to speak with more than a million of them. There's no doubt that they feel everything is going their way. Some were even impertinent enough to tell me they felt sorry for the Good Angels experiencing such problems! I asked them to identify the factors which were leading them to success. By way of response they cited the innate greed and selfishness of the individual Earthlings. It was easy to play on this, they said, and to point out that their fear of the unknown, the relentless march of technology leaving more time on their hands, the fewer prospects of being gainfully employed, and the constant driving down of standards to the lowest common denominator, leaving them fundamentally dissatisfied. All these factors play into the hands of the Bad Angels who suggest the solutions - to give the Earthlings "kicks", money, forgetfulness when things go wrong - with drugs and solutions such as theft, shop lifting, retail therapy and other inconsequential spending "comforts" and the like."

God The Father is surprisingly sanguine on receipt of this bad news. "You are right Gabriel" he says "But we must stop crying over spilt milk. We must decide on the options for action. But before we do, what have you learnt from the other Planets you visited?"

"Well Sir" Gabriel replies "As you'd expect they are all pretty het up. As I didn't have time to visit all the other Planets I concentrated on those nearest to earth, Mars, Pluto and Saturn. In a word they were puzzled. They know your powers and are mystified by the patience you are showing the Earthlings. They think they are exploiting your good nature. In particular the Martians are in favour of taking direct action. They are already doing their own thing to some

extent, sending down little meteorites to frighten the Earthlings. But those stupid people still believe that these asteroids are just freak accidents, not to be taken seriously. I fear that, if we

don't take action the Martians may be tempted to take other more major initiatives themselves and that would be a big mistake."

God The Father asks Michael for his thoughts on what action may be taken. He responds "Well Boss, I am in favour of having a showdown with the Bad Angels - and their leader. We all know that Lucifer is a bad egg - the leopard hasn't changed his spots since the beginning of time. He contaminates everything he touches and plots all the time. I would dearly like to know what he is plotting at this time"

Gabriel agrees that a showdown with Lucifer is now necessary. "You are right, Michael, I believe he is plotting something pretty big right now. He has been infected with the marketing disease which is rife on earth. And he fancies himself as a Spin Doctor. Marketing is the new type of war game which the Earthlings play."

God The Father is puzzled. "What are you talking about Michael? Explain yourself - and in plain English please. What is a war game and how does marketing become one?"

Gabriel tries to elucidate "Well, sir, a War Game means that you play out a situation of intense antagonism between two parties. All over earth it is very popular, mostly directed at capturing markets and selling goods and services, increasingly on a global scale. But recently there have been other more worrying aspects of the War Game with the increase of terrorism. Players plan endlessly to defeat their opponents by creating objectives to wipe them off the face of the earth in terms of commerce, politics or militarily. They use all their resources at their command to train their people, ending up by brain washing them completely."

"And what part do you think Lucifer is playing in all this?" asks God the Father.

"Well Sir, it may be a wild guess, but I believe Lucifer has got the marketing bug in a big way and is preparing his own War Game with you as his target. The Bad Angels are unquestionably making a good fist of their case and making good progress in getting the Earthlings to accept it. Their point is very persuasive - that greed, fear, selfishness and corruption pay dividends, huge dividends in terms of money, influence and real power. I believe Lucifer's game plan is to prepare to do battle with you again. What I don't know is when and where he will strike. I

believe. too, that he thinks your patience with the Earthlings is infinite - and that may be where he makes his biggest and final mistake."

Now God the Father is truly cross "That settles it then. Who the hell does Lucifer think he is, 6 and who the hell do the Earthlings think they are? Creation is, after all, my toy to do with as I will. I could simply put an end to all of it - Earthlings, Lucifer, et al - I could allocate the Good Angels to other planets, and then I could go on strike. Lucifer, Bad Angels, Earthlings will simply cease to exist. Earth itself would just fall out of the sky! For me it would be a blessed relief."

Michael and Gabriel exchange looks. There is nothing more to be said.