

# The Nine Choirs of Angels

**Seraphim** are the highest order or choir of angels. They are the angels who are attendants or guardians before God's throne. They praise God, calling, "Holy Holy Holy is the Lord of Hosts". The only Bible reference is Isaiah 6:1-7. One of them touched Isaiah's lips with a live coal from the altar, cleansing him from sin. Seraphim have six wings, two cover their faces, two cover their feet, and two are for flying.

**Cherubim** rank after the seraphim and are the second highest in the nine hierarchies or choirs of angels. The Old Testament does not reveal any evidence that the Jews considered them as intercessors or helpers of God. They were closely linked in God's glory. They are manlike in appearance and double-winged and were guardians of God's glory. They symbolized then, God's power and mobility. In the New Testament, they are alluded to as celestial attendants in the Apocalypse (Rev 4-6). Catholic tradition describes them as angels who have an intimate knowledge of God and continually praise Him.

**Thrones** are the Angels of pure Humility, Peace and Submission. They reside in the area of the cosmos where material form begins to take shape. The lower Choir of Angels need the Thrones to access God.

**Dominions** are Angels of Leadership. They regulate the duties of the angels, making known the commands of God.

**Virtues** are known as the Spirits of Motion and control the elements. They are sometimes referred to as "the shining ones." They govern all nature. They have control over seasons, stars, moon; even the sun is subject to their command. They are also in charge of miracles and provide courage, grace, and valor.

**Powers** are Warrior Angels against evil defending the cosmos and humans. They are known as potentates. They fight against evil spirits who attempt to wreak chaos through human beings. The chief is said to be either Samael or Camael, both angels of darkness.

**Archangels** are generally taken to mean "chief or leading angel" (Jude 9; 1 Thes 4:16), they are the most frequently mentioned throughout the Bible. They may be of this or other hierarchies as St. Michael Archangel, who is a princely Seraph. The Archangels have a unique role as God's messenger to the people at critical times in history and salvation (Tb 12:6, 15; Jn 5:4; Rev 12:7-9) as in The Annunciation and Apocalypse. A feast day celebrating the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael is celebrated throughout the Church Sep 29. A special part of the Byzantine Liturgy invokes the "Cherubic Hymn" which celebrates these archangels and the guardian angels particularly.

Of special significance is St. Michael as he has been invoked as patron and protector by the Church from the time of the Apostles. The Eastern Rite and many others place him over all the angels, as Prince of the Seraphim. He is described as the "chief of princes" and as the leader of the forces of heaven in their triumph over Satan and his followers. The angel Gabriel first appeared in the Old Testament in the prophesies of Daniel, he announced the prophecy of 70 weeks (Dn 9:21-27). He appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of St. John the Baptist (Lk 1:11). It was also Gabriel which proclaimed the Annunciation of Mary to be the mother of our Lord and Savior. (Lk 1:26) The angel Raphael first appeared in the book of Tobit (Tobias) Tb 3:25, 5:5-28, 6-12). He announces "I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the throne of God." (Tb 12:15)

**Principalities** In the New Testament Principalities refers to one type of spiritual (metaphysical) being which are now quite hostile to God and human beings. (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15) Along with the principalities are the powers (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 1 Pt 3:22; 2 Thes 1:7); and cosmological powers (1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; Col 2:15); Dominions (Eph 1:21; Col 1:16) and thrones (Col 1:16). The clarity of the New Testament witness helps see that these beings were created through Christ and for Him (Col 1:16). Given their hostility to God and humans due to sin, Christ's ultimate rule over them (ibid) expresses the reign of the Lord over all in the cosmos. This is the Lordship of Christ, which reveals God's tremendous salvation in conquering sin and death at the cross, and now takes place in the Church. (Eph 3:10)

**Angels** These angels are closest to the material world and human beings. They deliver the prayers to God and God's answers and other messages to humans. Angels have the capacity to access any and all other Angels at any time. They are the most caring and social to assist those who ask for help.

# How Do Guardian Angels Work?

By Jimmy Akin, Catholic Answers, 2022

*Guardian angel* is a modern term, and it would strike biblical audiences as rather surprising. The term *angel* (Hebrew, *mal'ak*; Greek, *angelos*) means messenger, and a messenger and a guardian are different. Talking about guardian angels—guardian messengers—would be a little like talking about dentist messengers or accountant messengers.

St. Augustine famously writes: The angels are spirits. When they are simply spirits, they are not angels, but when they are sent, they become angels; for “angel” is the name of a function, not of a nature. If you inquire about the nature of such beings, you find that they are spirits; if you ask what their office is, the answer is that they are angels. . . . Make a comparison with human affairs. The name of someone’s nature is “human being,” the name of his job is “soldier.” . . . Similarly some beings existed who were created by God as spirits, but he makes them angels by sending them to announce what he has ordered them (*Expositions of the Psalms* 103:1:15).

The Bible uses other terms for non-human spirits that aren’t *functioning* as messengers. Sometimes high-ranking ones are called “sons of God” (Hebrew, *bney Elohim*) or “princes” (Hebrew, *sarim*)—as opposed to low-ranking spirits who run errands and deliver messages. However, since low-ranking spirits have contact with humans, we encountered messengers frequently, and during the Christian age the term *angel* started being applied to *every* non-human spirit other than God.

**When do we first hear about guardian angels?** Immediately after the fall of man, we read: He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24).

Today these beings would be classified as angels, but notice that the word isn’t used. They’re not delivering messages, and so they’re called cherubim. (Also, cherubs weren’t little babies with wings—those are known in Italian as *putti*. Cherubim were depicted as frightening animal-human hybrids; see Ezek. 10.)

Together with the flaming sword, these cherubim serve as the first angelic guardians in the Bible. But they’re not guarding humans. They’re guarding “the way to the tree of life.”

**When is the first time we see angels guarding a human?** In the story of Lot, God sends messengers (using the term “angel”) to warn him and his family of the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:12-22). When he delays leaving, they even grab him and force him out of the city!

We thus see angels being assigned to guard human beings. However, this is a temporary assignment of these angels—not a regular duty.

**When is the first mention of angelic beings assigned to regularly guard humans?** In the song of Moses, we read this: Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage (Deut. 32:7-9).

What does the text mean when it says God divided mankind and fixed the nations’ borders “according to the number of the sons of God”?

“The sons of God” were high-ranking spirits that today would be called angels, and the idea was that God allotted the different nations to the care and command of these angelic beings—*except* Israel. He kept Israel as “his people.”

We thus see angelic guardians assigned to guard *groups* of people—nations—but not yet individuals.

**The same guardians appear in the book of Daniel.** Here they are called “princes” or “commanders” (*sarim* can be translated either way).

Daniel fasts and prays, and three weeks later, Gabriel shows up. He explains the delay by saying that “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” detained him, but Michael—“one of the chief princes” (10:13)—assisted him.

Gabriel also says he and Michael will fight the prince of Persia, making way for the prince of Greece to become prominent (vv. 20-21).

This heavenly conflict indicates that some “sons of God” are opposing God’s will. Today we would call such beings demons, and this was the common biblical understanding of who the gods of foreign people were—their guardian angels who went bad.

Michael is later described as “the great prince who has charge of your people” (12:1), indicating God has now incorporated Michael in the governorship of Israel.

**The first time we read about angels regularly guarding individual humans is in Matthew.** Discussing discipline within the Church, Jesus says: See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven (18:10).

“These little ones” appear to be Christians (not children), so there is a link between Christians and angels who guard them.

Jesus says these angels “always see the face of my Father who is in heaven”—meaning that they have unlimited access to God’s throne room. If something bad is happening with one of their charges, they are guaranteed the ability to intercede with God.

**Scripture doesn’t give us much more information about angelic guardians.** But that hasn’t stopped Christians from wondering about them.

Based on the passage in Matthew, they have wondered if only Christians have guardian angels or whether all humans do. The *Catechism* is ambiguous, saying that God surrounds “human life” with angels and that “each believer” has an angel (336).

People have also wondered—on the theory that only Christians might have guardian angels—whether we gain them at baptism or birth.

St. Thomas Aquinas favored the view that all human beings get guardian angels at birth (ST I:113:5). Today we might push this back to conception, and the *Catechism* circumspectly says that human life has the care of angels “from its beginning until death” (*ibid.*).

Do some people get extra guardian angels? Like those who become priests or get married and need grace for their vocation?

Scripture indicates that—in a general way—people may have more than one angel looking out for them. An ancient Israelite had Michael as national patron—plus his own individual guardian angel. Today Michael is regarded as the patron of the Church, yet Christians also have individual guardians. And we saw from Lot’s case that additional guardians could be assigned as needed.

However, we have no biblical evidence of God regularly assigning extra angels to people in states like the priesthood or marriage.

What about the reverse? Could a single angel guard more than one person—the way a shepherd guards a flock of sheep? Jesus’ statement in Matthew doesn’t rule this out. In speaking of “these little ones,” he says, “their angels,” but he doesn’t say each person has uniquely one angel. Further, Israel is still God’s people, and unless Michael has abandoned his former charge for the Church, he may well be guarding *two* groups of God’s people.

Like everything in this area, this is a matter of speculation, and we ultimately can’t know. What we can know is that we *are* protected by angelic guardians *and* that God will never let us lack protection. Regardless of the mechanics of how it works out in the invisible world, the amount of protection we need is the amount we will have.

# Catholic Catechism on the Angels

*by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.*

Although human reason can reasonably speculate that angels exist, the existence of pure created spirits requires divine revelation to make the fact absolutely certain. Indeed a fair index of sound Christianity is the acceptance of angels as created by God and now living in two states of being: those in heaven who also minister to our needs, and those in hell, who are demons and bent on the destruction of the human race through estrangement from God.

Why a catechism on the angels? Because we need one. There is such a preoccupation with human psychology and physiology as almost to exclude the whole world of reality which is at once intelligent and deeply involved in the affairs of men. Even in Christian circles, the complaint has been justly made that "the angels have taken flight from Catholic schools of thought," with only token attention from some professional theologians.

There is another reason why a catechism on the angels is necessary. As a reaction to the prevalent secularism in so-called developed countries, an avalanche of cults and movements has gone to the other extreme. Preoccupation with the invisible powers of the world has produced scores of pseudo-religions that have also penetrated Catholic circles. The New Age movement, borrowed from the Oriental non-Christian world, has deeply penetrated Catholic thinking in Europe and North America.

The angels play a major role in the history of God's dealing with the human race. From the dawn of creation when the evil spirit successfully tempted our first parents, to the Incarnation announced by the angel Gabriel, angelic spirits are an essential part of Messianic history. Since the coming of Christ, angels are more than ever the messengers of the Good News which they first announced to the shepherds at Bethlehem.

Why a catechism on the angels? Because there are also demons who seduce human beings into sin. We had better know how to recognize when we are being inspired by the good angels and when we are being instigated evil spirits.

In the present catechism we shall cover six distinct propositions of our Catholic faith: that God created angelic world, composed of beings that are pure spirits; that among these some remain faithful to God and reached their heavenly destiny, while others, though gifted with divine grace, lost it and were thereby condemned to eternal punishment; that it is part of God's ordinary providence to have the heavenly spirits minister our needs and assist us to reach heaven; and correspondingly it is part of divine permissive providence to allow the fallen angels to try and tempt us into sin in order to keep us from our eternal destiny.

Before we enter on what our faith teaches us about the angels, it will be useful to explain some of the basic terms in what we technically call angelology. Then we should say something about the adversaries who either deny the existence of angels altogether or dissent from the Church's official teaching about the spiritual beings created by God.

## Explanation of Angelic Terms

The best way to enter our catechetical study of the angels is to express this study in the form of a thesis. The thesis is a compendium of the Catholic Church's teaching on the angels. This thesis comes in two declarative sentences, each of which is a profession of the Catholic faith on who the angels are and how are they part of the providence of God: There exist angels, who are pure spirits; of whom some persevered in grace and entered heaven while others sinned and were damned. The good angels are sent as guardians, but demons tempt men to sin. The logic of this catechism will follow the sequence of ideas expressed in the above thesis.

### **1. What is the meaning of the word "angel"?**

The word "angel", from the Greek *angelos*, etymologically means "one who is sent" or a "messenger."

### **2. What is an angel?**

An angel is a spiritual creature, especially one in heavenly glory, who is superior to human beings and often commissioned by God for certain duties on earth. As explained by St. Augustine, "the name angel belongs to his office, not to his nature. You ask what is the name of his nature. He is a spirit. You ask what is the name of his office. He is an angel."

### **3. What is the meaning of "angel" in Catholic theology?**

In Catholic theology the term "angel" refers to all spiritual creatures whether in glory with God or eternally separate from God in hell. We may therefore define angels as purely spiritual created substances where each word in the definition has special significance.

### **4. How are angels substantial beings?**

They are substantial because they exist of and by themselves. They are not mere personifications of God's activity in the world. The angels really exist.

### **5. How important is it to know that the angels are created?**

It is most important to distinguish the angels from God and specify their essentially contingent nature. They are contingent because they were brought into existence and are preserved in the same by the power of God. Among the polytheistic religions, what we call angels are considered deities or gods.

## **6. How are the angels spiritual substances?**

They are spiritual substances because they are both different from and superior by nature to human beings, who are a composite of matter and spirit. Unlike angels, human beings are rational *animals*. Moreover, angels are still further removed by their spirituality from all material things that are not endowed with an intellect and will.

## **7. How are angels purely spiritual substances?**

They are purely spiritual substances to further distinguish them from us who are not purely spiritual but also material. Furthermore, the angels are purely spiritual to distinguish them from disembodied human spirits or souls which still have, as we call it, an aptitude for reunion with the body. We know on faith that our souls will be reunited with our bodies in the final resurrection.

## **8. What was the grace which the angels possessed when they were created?**

It was sanctifying grace. It was a supernatural gift of God which gave them a share in the divine nature along with a title to inherit the Kingdom of God in the beatific vision. Associated with sanctifying grace, the angels also received the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, together with a right to those actual graces which were necessary to preserve and increase the supernatural life.

## **9. Were the angels not originally created in heaven?**

No, the angels had to cooperate with the grace of God to reach heaven.

## **10. Why then does Jesus say, "I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven"(Luke 10:18)?**

The word "heaven" in this context does not mean the possession of God in the Beatific Vision. Rather it means that the angels fell from sanctifying grace which gave them a title to heaven.

## **11. What then does it mean that some of the angels entered heaven?**

It means that those angels who cooperated with God's grace merited to see God face to face. It further means that all the angels were originally on probation. They were, in theological terms, in via, that is "on the way" to heaven. It finally means that those who reached heaven by using their free will to cooperate with the will of God.

## **12. How did some of the angels sin?**

The Church's tradition tells us they sinned by pride and envy. This was the primary sin of the angels. It was the sin of a spiritual being, since the angels have no bodies. The angels sinned because they refused to God as their Creator.

However, the angels also sinned by envy. They coveted the Divine excellence. We may also say they envied human beings who, they understood, would also reach heavenly beatitude.

## **13. What was the damnation of the unfaithful angels?**

Basically, it was, and is, eternal separation from God. What our faith tells us is that the punishment of the angels is the same as that of human beings who die unrepentant of their grave sins.

## **14. What precisely is the mission of the good angels?**

Their mission is expressed by the term "sent", which is technical and includes two elements:

1. going forth from God as Sender, and
2. a new kind of presence with respect to the visible world.

## **15. What are the offices of the good angels?**

They have a variety of offices or responsibilities: with relation to God, to Jesus Christ, to one another, and to the human race:

- with regard to God, their office is to praise, bless, adore, and respond with perfect obedience to the will of God.
- toward Jesus Christ, their office is to serve Him, even as man, as declared by St. Paul, "let all the angels of God adore Him" (Hebrews 1:6).
- among the angels themselves, the office of the superior is to enlighten those who are lesser.
- the angelic office towards human beings includes both directly spiritual interests and those material needs which are related to our heavenly destiny. Moreover, the angels' guardianship is over the whole human race. Under this providence are included believers and unbelievers, including those who have not reached the use of reason and, in fact, have not yet been born.

## **16. In God's permissive providence, what is the activity of the fallen angels towards human beings?**

Temptations by the devil are only one, although the most common, form of demonic assault which is permitted by God. The three basic ways in which devils assault human beings are by temptation, obsession and magic. Each of these will be explained later on. For the present our focus is on temptations.

## **17. How are human beings tempted?**

In general, the temptations may be either probative or seductive.

## **18. What are probative temptations?**

These are temptations directed to our moral benefit. They come either from God, or the good angels or from other human beings. In ordinary language, we call these trials. Literally, however, they are temptations since the Latin verb, tentare means "to test" or "to try" or "to prove."

## **19. What are seductive temptations?**

Seductive temptations are intended to seduce or lead to moral harm, to cause us to sin. These temptations are properly speaking diabolical.

**20. What is the underlying implication in all temptations?**

All temptations imply that a human being is put to the test, to find out something about him, either to his spiritual benefit or injury as the case may be.

**21. How do theologians further distinguish temptations from the devil?**

They distinguish internal temptations which are not sensibly perceptible, from temptations which are sensibly perceptible, whether the perception is in our internal or external senses.

**22. What are internal temptations of the evil spirit?**

Internal temptations by the devil take place through direct action by the evil spirit upon our sense faculties or imagination. The latter take the form of apparitions, diabolical locutions, hallucinations and the like.

**23. What are sensibly perceptible demonic temptations?**

They are the most common way in which the devil tempts human beings. He uses our faculties of sight and sound, of taste and smell, and of bodily feeling as the channels of seduction.

**Adversaries**

Over the centuries, angels have been an essential part of religious history. We might almost say that angelic belief is a fair test of religious authenticity. What people believe, or do not believe, about angels is a good index of validity of their religious faith. When we speak about adversaries in angelology, we include not only individual doubts or denials about Catholic doctrine. We also include whole systems of thought that may have become separate religions.

**24. Who are the principal adversaries that deny the existence of angels?**

Against the existence of angels are all Materialists, Pantheists, Rationalists, Spiritualists, and Polytheists.

**25. Why do Materialists deny the existence of angels?**

They deny the existence of angels because they either deny all spiritual reality or at least the real distinction between matter and spirit.

**26. How do Materialists understand reality?**

For Materialists, all reality is essentially quantitative; all reality has extension in space and time; all reality is sensibly perceptible. On these terms, nothing exists except what is material, quantitative, or perceptible by the senses.

**27. What is the most influential form of Materialism in modern history?**

The most influential form of Materialism in modern times is Marxism. According to Karl Marx, nothing really exists but matter, which contains within itself the principle of its own development. In other words, even what we call "spirit", developed from matter. Man is the spearhead of this necessary evolution.

On the premises of materialism, angels are a poetic or religious fantasy.

**28. Why do Pantheists deny the existence of angels?**

They deny the existence of angels because they claim that all things are divine, or that God and the universe are really identical, or there is ultimately no real distinction between God and what believers in creation call the world. While the word "angels" may be used by professed Pantheists, they deny the existence of spiritual beings who are created from nothing by God.

**29. Why do rationalists deny the existence of angels?**

The Sadducees among the Jews, the Socinians in the Middle Ages, and the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century regarded the angels as only metaphorical personifications of divine power. Modern Rationalists unanimously reject the existence of an angelic world.

**30. Why do rationalists deny that there are angels?**

Rationalists deny the existence of angels because they claim the concept of angel is either a fruit of ignorance, or the vestige of primitive religion, or a modified form of polytheism. Some say that the Jews borrowed the idea from the Babylonians and after the exile expressed this borrowing in their sacred books.

**31. What do some rationalists say about angels in the earlier books of the Old Testament?**

They say that these references to "angels" should be understood as human beings who are called angels because of some special mission which they served.

**32. What do Rationalists say about angels in the New Testament scriptures?**

They claim that "angels" are simply accommodations to the Old Testament mythology.

**33. What do Spiritualists say about the existence of angels?**

Spiritualists believe in responsive communication between people on earth and the souls of departed human beings. On these grounds, spiritualism identifies these disembodied spirits with the angels of the Catholic faith.

**34. How do Protestants view the existence of angels?**

Protestantism ranges from strongly biblical believers to rationalists. Among the founders of Protestantism, John Calvin's position is typical of those who accept the Bible as divine revelation. In the first section of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin states, "The angels are the dispensers and administrators of the divine beneficence towards us; they regard our safety, undertake our defense, direct our ways, and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us."

### **35. How do Protestants view devotion to the angels?**

In general, Protestants would identify devotion to the angels as praising God and thanking Him for giving us angelic assistance and protection.

### **36. What reservations do Protestants have about devotion to the angels?**

Their basic reservation is praying to the angels. It all depends on how uncompromising is their Protestantism. In historic Protestantism, salvation is absolutely predestined. The basis for this position comes from John Calvin, whose most famous modern disciple was Karl Barth. According to Barth, "Prayer...is answered before we express it. We pray for that which has already been accomplished by an eternal act of God, directed to its own proper end" (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 31). On these terms, prayer to the angels is never invoking them to intercede for us. It is rather thanking God for the help He has already given us through the angels.

### **37. How far do some Protestant writers go in their criticism of praying to the angels?**

Some call this "Celestial Quackery." They ridicule the idea of communicating with the celestial spirits. Among the practices denounced is one like the following, "If you are someone who is concerned about God hearing your prayer 'down here,' trust in the angels' messenger service for a quick delivery of your prayer to God" (Ron Rhodes, *Angels Among Us*, p. 41).

### **38. Do all Christians believe that the angels were originally created in the state of grace?**

This has been the common teaching of the Catholic Church. Thus, Saint John Damascene says, "All the angels were created by the Word of God and perfected by the Holy Spirit through sanctification; corresponding to their dignity and to their order of rank, they became participators in the illumination and the grace" (*The Orthodox Faith*, II, 3).

### **39. Who denies the fall and damnation of the angels?**

All Materialists, Rationalists, and Spiritualists deny both that the angels fell from God's friendship and that they were eternally condemned to hell.

### **40. What was the teaching of Origen about the devils?**

Origen (A.D. 185-254) was a great writer in the early Church, a specialist in exegesis and spiritual theology. It is not clear how much of his teaching was his own or that of his followers called Origenists. But Origenism has deeply penetrated modern Christian thought. Among its theories is the preexistence of souls, which has deeply influenced Mormonism. Origenism denied the personal identity of mortal and glorified bodies. It claimed that the devil and those in hell will eventually be saved. Origenism was condemned as heresy by the Second Council of Constantinople in A.D. 553.

### **41. Who denies the angelic guardianship of human beings?**

Those who claim that guardian angels are a Jewish development from pagan mythology. Some again deny guardian angels as a residue from primitive polytheism. Polytheists believe that there are protective spirits whom some oriental religions worship as their gods. Finally, some eisegeses believe that what we call guardian angels were protective agents that were still prevalent among the Mediterranean religions at the time of Christ.

### **42. Who denies temptations by the devil?**

The most obvious adversaries of demonic temptations are those who deny the existence of angels and demons.

### **43. What modern adversaries deny diabolical temptations?**

In general, liberal Protestants temptations by the evil spirit are said to be mythological expressions of naiveté. Modern psychology teaches that these temptations are personified as coming from evil spirits, when actually they are merely our own inner tensions that have no grounds in objective reality. They are psychological personifications of a pathological state of mind.

## **Doctrinal Value**

As we enter the subject of the doctrinal value of the Church's teaching on the angels it is imperative that we understand the meaning of doctrinal value. In general, dogmatic value means the certitude with which a believing Catholic is to accept what is being taught by or in the Church. There is a variety of doctrinal values, as we call them, in angelology. In general, however, we can distinguish six levels of doctrinal value in the science of the angels. Each of these levels has its own distinctive degree of certitude and corresponding obligation for acceptance by the faithful.

### **44. What is the first and highest level of doctrinal value in angelology?**

The highest level of doctrinal value is where a doctrine has been defined by the Catholic Church as formally revealed by God.

### **45. What is this kind of doctrine called in Catholic theology?**

It is called dogma. Not all doctrines are dogmas. Everything which the Church teaches is a doctrine. But not all doctrine is dogma. A doctrine becomes a dogma when it has been expressly revealed in Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition. Thus, the existence of angels and demons is a dogma of the Faith.

### **46. What is the second level of doctrinal teaching?**

Doctrinal teaching is called dogmatic doctrine when it has been revealed by God, either in Scripture or in Tradition; but the teaching comes not from formal definitions by the Bishop of Rome or from councils of the Church approved by the pope. It is infallible doctrine, indeed, but the source of the Church's knowledge is derived from her unbroken teaching over the centuries. This is commonly called the Church's universal ordinary magisterium. An example of this kind of dogma would be the existence of guardian angels for all Christians.

#### **47. What is the third level of the Church's teaching on the angels?**

The third level of the Church's angelic teaching is what we call "infallible doctrine." Notice we shift from the word "dogma" to the word "doctrine". Technically, a doctrine is not a dogma when it has not been explicitly revealed in the Bible or the Tradition which closed with the death of the last apostle. An example would be invoking the angels for their guidance and protection.

#### **48. What is the fourth level of the Church's teaching?**

The fourth level of the Church's teaching is commonly called "certain doctrine." There is shift from doctrine which is infallible to doctrine which is merely certain. Infallibility implies irreversibility. Certainty implies that something is not to be doubted, without claiming that it is infallible. An example of angelic certainty would be that every human being, from the moment of conception, has a guardian angel. Another example would be that, on creation, all the angels received sufficient grace to attain their heavenly destiny.

#### **49. What is the fifth level of the Church's teaching on the angels?**

On this level, the Church teaches what we call probable doctrine about the angelic world. Here it is assumed that the teaching may be legitimately accepted by the mind and put into devotional practice, without claiming that the doctrine is so certain it would be sinful to call it into question. A common example of probable doctrine is that all the angels, both the saved and the lost, were originally created in the state of sanctifying grace. Those who remained in sanctifying grace, reached heavenly glory; those who were unfaithful to the will of God lost sanctifying grace and the beatific vision for their sins. It is also probable doctrine that God appoints only one guardian angel for each human being. This angel remains the protective spirit of that person until bodily death, but is not reassigned to anyone else until the end of the world.

#### **50. What is the sixth and final doctrinal level of Christian angelology?**

This is the level of permissibility. There have been positions on the state and function of the angels that we may call speculative for the mind to believe, and permissible for the will to put into practice. This level of angelic theology is literally an ocean. It covers innumerable ideas that pious believers have held about the angelic world and put these ideas into practical devotion. To be stressed here is that they are permissible, which means that they may be held without contradicting established Catholic truth and without departing from the Church's traditional spirituality. One of many examples of such permissible belief is that not only individuals have their own guardian angels, but societies, cities and states and whole nations have their own distinctive guardian spirits. So too it may be held that parishes and dioceses, religious institutes and the whole Catholic Church have a multitude of angels who are selectively appointed to direct and protect their collective charges.

### **Theological Evidence**

As we begin our treatment of angelology, it will be useful to distinguish several levels of resources that are used to establish the Church's teaching. First, we'll ask ourselves what is the Church's official teaching on the subject that we are treating. Ecclesiastical documents will be quoted and applied to what we may call the doctrinal proof of a thesis that we are stating as part of the Church's magisterium. Following the ecclesiastical sources, we shall look at Sacred Scripture and see what the Bible tells us on the subject we are treating. Thirdly, and at some length, we plan to look at what is sometimes called theological reason. It is, if you wish, what the human mind enlightened by grace may conclude from both the Church's teaching and from biblical revelation.

### **Part One: There Exist Angels**

As we begin our proof for the existence of angels, two things should be kept in mind. There can be no doubt that the angels really exist, or that the angels in heavenly glory and demons in eternal separation from God. There should also be no doubt that the angels have a twofold role in God's providence. They are to worship God and venerate His divine majesty through all eternity, and they are to assist us in our probation here on earth in order that we might join the angels in heavenly glory.

To be also kept in mind that it is one thing to believe a truth of our faith, and something much more to understand what we believe.

As we enter on the investigation of the theological evidence for the Church's angelology, we should always keep in mind that the purpose of theology is to grasp what we believe. This means that our faith is to become more meaningful, more intelligent, more clear, more certain, more practical, more defensible and more communicable to others.

The purpose of this course on the angels is not only to teach us what we are to believe about the angelic world. Our purpose is also, and emphatically, to be able to share our angelic faith with others. This means to be able to help those who are confused about Christian teaching on the angels. We are to convince those who doubt or deny even the existence of the angels, that there is a spiritual world created by God to serve the interests of the human race. We are to grow in our devotion to the angels whose service of God is to cooperate with us in reaching our heavenly destiny. We are finally to become more aware, than ever before, of the existence of an angelic evil world that is constantly at work to seduce human beings from their service of God and, if possible, bring them into that darkness where they are eternally estranged from the God for whom they were made.

### **I. Ecclesiastical Authority**

There are three principal sources of ecclesiastical authority on the angels: the Fourth Lateran Council, the First Vatican Council and the Second Vatican Council.



**51. What was the occasion for the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 AD)?**

The occasion for the Fourth Lateran Council was to defend the Faith against the Albigenses. Albigensinism was a modified form of Manichaeism. It claimed that a good deity created the world of the spirit, and an evil god the material world, including the human body, which is under his control. The good deity sent Jesus Christ, as a creature to deliver human souls from their imprisonment. On these terms, the good angels were created by the good deity, and the devils by the evil god.

**52. What was the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council?**

Its teaching comes in several parts.

- There is only one true God, eternal, immense, unchangeable, incomprehensible, omnipotent and indescribable.
- God has no beginning, He always is and always will be.
- God is the creator of all things, visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, who, by His almighty power from the very beginning of time has created both orders of creation in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or visible universe.
- Afterwards He formed the creature man, who in a way belongs to both orders, as He is composed of spirit and body.
- The devil and other demons were created by God good according to their nature, but they made themselves evil by their own doing.

**53. What is the teaching of the First Vatican Council (1870)?**

The First Vatican Council repeats the teaching of Fourth Lateran. It states:

- In order to manifest His perfection through the benefits which He bestows on creatures: not to intensify His happiness nor to acquire any perfection - this one and only true God, by His goodness and almighty power, and by a completely free decision, from the very beginning of time has created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or visible universe. And afterwards He formed the creature man, who in a way belongs to both orders as he is composed of spirit and body.

**54. What did the Second Vatican Council (1964 AD) teach about the angels?**

Among other statements, the faithful are told that, "the Church has always believed that the Apostles and Christ's martyrs, who gave the supreme richness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely united with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels, with a special love, and has asked piously for the help of their intercessor" (*Lumen Gentium*, 50).

**55. What then can we say is the summary of the Church's teaching on the existence of the angels?**

This teaching tells us that the angels did not always exist. They had to be created by God out of nothing, by His almighty loving power. They were created before the human race. They were all created good. Some of the angels fell from divine friendship by their disobedience and became demons.

**II. Sacred Scripture**

The pages of Scripture from Genesis to the Apocalypse are a tissue of testimony to the existence of angels. Belief in angels permeates the entire Old Testament. The Cherubim are present in paradise after the fall of our first parents and receive the commission to watch over the garden of God. In the company of two angels, Yahweh appeared to Abraham at the terebinths of Mamre; the angels then went on to Sodom. Angels appeared to Jacob and were also prominent in the lives and writings of the prophets and of the sacred writers in the period after the exile. At the time of Christ, only the Sadducees denied the existence of angels. Specifically, the Scriptures give us illustrative evidence of all the principle phases of angelic existence.

**56. Are the angels in the Scriptures intelligent and substantial beings?**

Yes. The Bible describes the angels as dealing with human beings in the manner of men, that is, as intelligent persons. Angels communicate with human persons, who in turn communicate with the angels.

**57. What are some of the ministries of the angels in the Bible?**

There is no limit to the variety of ways in which angels minister to the needs of human beings. They speak to people, they correct those who are doing wrong, the good angels lead people to serve God faithfully, the devils seduce men into sin. The angels instruct people's minds, they announce important events like the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, they admonish and minister to human needs. Yet all the while they are in the presence of God whom they never cease to adore.

**58. What is the classic statement of Christ about the angels?**

In context Christ is warning His followers about giving scandal. Then He adds, speaking of children, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, that their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

**59. What does the Bible tell us about the angels in relation to God?**

The Scriptures teach that the angels were created by God and inferior to Him. St. Paul expressly says they were created (Colossians 1:16), inferior to God (Ephesians 1:21), (Hebrews 1:4-14). They adore God and bless Him at all times (Ps 96:7, 102:20).

**60. What is the biblical distinction between angels and human beings?**

The Scriptures tell us that angels are different from men. Although invisible to bodily senses by nature, they may become visible to human beings (Tobias 5).

**61. Is there any distinction of gender among the angels?**

No, as Christ foretold regarding the final resurrection of the dead. Speaking of risen human beings, He says, "At the resurrection we will neither marry or be given in marriage but will be as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

**62. Are the angels exempt from the ordinary physical laws of gravity?**

Yes, the angels are exempt from the ordinary physical laws of gravity and impenetrability, because they have nothing material or quantitative in their nature. The laws of gravity and impenetrability do not affect spiritual beings.

**63. How are the angels superior to human beings?**

They are superior to human beings because they are pure spirits with nothing material, or quantitative, or sensibly perceptible in their constitution. Unlike us, angels do not depend on a body to either acquire ideas or communicate ideas to others. The angels do not have to eat or drink in order to sustain themselves in life. The angels are not limited in their movement as we are by our bodies. The angels are naturally more like God, who is the uncreated Pure Spirit, than we who are both spiritual and corporeal.

**64. How does St. Paul describe the superiority of the angels to human beings?**

In his letter to the Romans (1:4-14), the apostle is describing the sublimity of Christ and His superiority to all creation. He begins his comparison of Christ with the angels, and therefore presupposes that angels are by nature higher than men. In the same way, when Scripture wants to declare the greatness of man, it likens him to the angels (Ps 77). St. Peter, in denouncing the heretics of his day, says, "Rash and self-willed such men in their deriding do not regard majesty; whereas the angels, though greater in strength and power do not bring against themselves an abusive charge" (2 Pt 2:11).

### **III. Theological Reason**

We can reasonably speculate to the existence of angels but we cannot prove their existence from reason alone. Why not? Because there are no natural effects in the visible world from which to argue conclusively to an angelic cause. Once God revealed the existence of the angels, we can reflect on the propriety of their creation. There are various grades of being in the world. Each has a different perfection. There is the merely corporeal world without life, the vegetative and the sentient. Essentially superior is man, who combines in himself body and spirit. At the head stands infinite Being who is God. Given the existence of angels, the hierarchy of beings is completed. They are purely spiritual yet created. Consequently, as spiritual they are above all material reality, including man, but as created beings they are below God.

**65. Why did God create the angels?**

God created the world for His glory. He wants to be glorified by intelligent beings endowed with a mind and free will.

**66. Would God have received the same glory if He had not created the angels?**

No, it is the common teaching of the Church that God wants to be glorified by intelligent beings. The angels, who are superior to human beings in intelligence, are able to give God greater glory and more love than human beings.

**67. Are angels then necessary for the perfection of the created world?**

Yes, we say that the perfection of the universe "requires" that there be creatures who are purely intellectual and volitional beings, namely, angels.

**68. Why are angels more perfect creatures than human beings?**

Angels are more perfect because, by their very nature, they are more like God. God is pure intellect and will, unlike human beings who also have a body.

**69. Did God have to create the angels?**

No, He is not bound to create either a more perfect or the most perfect universe. He could have created a world with no angelic creatures.

### **Part Two: Angels are Pure Spirits**

The expression, "pure spirits," is ambiguous. In theological language it means intelligent beings with a free will who do not have any quantitative elements in their nature. The purity of angels, therefore, means that they are not perceptible by the senses; and they have no weight or size or shape or color or texture. They are not bodily. They have no extension in space. As human beings we are so surrounded by matter that we are tempted to identify what is real with what is material. A common phrase like, "It is immaterial to me," illustrates the prejudice. To say that the angels are pure spirits has no more implications. It is rather to identify the angels as not having what we consider a perfection, namely, a body.

### **I. Ecclesiastical Authority**

The same three sources that testify to the existence of the angels are also our principal authorities for their pure spirituality. The Fourth Lateran Council set the basis; the First Vatican Council built on this base; and the Second Vatican Council repeated what had been taught by the Church for almost eight centuries.

#### **70. How does the Church identify the angels as pure spirits?**

She identifies the angels as pure spirits in four ways:

- by declaring that the angels are spiritual and not corporeal.
- by describing the angels as “invisible.” Thus, they are not perceptible by the senses.
- by distinguishing the angels from the material universe.
- by stating that God also created human beings who are composed of both body and spirit.

#### **71. Among the three ecclesiastical sources, which is the most authoritative?**

The most authoritative is the Fourth Lateran Council. The First and Second Vatican Councils basically repeat what was solemnly defined by the Fourth Lateran.

### **II. Sacred Scripture and Tradition**

#### **72. What is our biblical basis for saying the angels are pure spirits?**

The biblical basis is the consistent use of the word “spirit” when speaking of the angels. Thus St. Paul asked, “Are they not all ministering spirits,” in his letter to the Hebrews (1:14). Again, Christ is said to “drive out the spirit by a word” (Matthew 8:16), referring to the Savior’s exorcising people possessed by the evil spirit.

#### **73. How do we reason negatively to the angels being pure spirits?**

Sacred Scripture says nothing about the angels having their own bodies. At most they may have bodies which they assume. Moreover, there is no mention in the bible of “the souls of angels,” nor of anything that would suggest that the angels were composed of body and spirit.

#### **74. How do we reason positively to the angels being pure spirits?**

As we have seen, the term “angel” refers to the mission which the heavenly hosts have in ministering to our human needs. But the consistent use of the word “spirit” argues to the nature which the angels have. It is a nature that is not a composite of body and soul. Moreover, three types of intellectual beings are spoken of in the scripture as “spirit,” namely, the human soul, God, and angels. But when the soul is called a spirit, the term is never without a context, which implies relation to a body as “the spirit of man...our spirit...the spirit which is in man.” Whereas the term is used of God without qualification, “God is a spirit” (John 4:24), and consequently when used of angels also without qualification. We may therefore logically conclude that the spirit in question is without bodily composition.

### **III. Patristic Evidence**

There was ambiguity among some of the early Fathers of the Church on the pure spirituality of the angels. All this means is that there has been development of doctrine on angelic spirituality in the history of the Church. However, even among the very early Fathers, many had no doubt that angels are without bodies. Thus, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, “All rational creation is divided into the corporeal and the incorporeal nature; the incorporeal is angelic, the other is we human beings” (*On the Lord’s Prayer*, 4). Again, St. Gregory the Great asks, “Who could rationally say that spiritual beings are corporeal?” And again, “An angel is only spirit, whereas man is both spirit and flesh” (*Dialogues*, 4:29; *Morals*, 4:3).