

Development of Angels in the Christian Tradition

Readings : CCC

Patella, Michael: **Angels and Demons, chapter 5**

Nowell, Irene, OSB: **101 Questions & Answers on Angels and Devils**

Kreeft, Peter: **Angels and Demons**

The Catholic Study Bible

Guardian Angels: https://youtu.be/_2f_jo5crtY

Religious and Cultural Understanding of Angels

A long time exists between the descriptions of angels we read in the Bible and the angels dancing on Christmas trees, the cherubs holding up ornate cornices on buildings, and the pixies decorating greeting cards. (Patella, p. 59)

- Christianity, Judaism, Islam
 - Angels do not compromise uniqueness and supremacy of the one God
- Buddhism, Hinduism, others
 - Divine beings similar in function, but very different relation to human life, creation, salvation
- Secular understanding
 - Substantial departure from above sources

What an Angel Is and Is not

- Purely spiritual beings created by God; no physical bodies
- Not born, will not die, no souls
- Humans do not become angels at death
- No Biblical account of angelic creation
- Extrabiblical (pseudepigraphic and literary) sources
 - Consistent with overall Biblical narrative

Pseudepigraphic Sources (see Nowell, p.6-7)

(Not included in any canon of Scripture, Christian or Jewish)

- Books of Enoch
 - Enoch mentioned in Gen 5:23-24 (only Biblical reference)
 - “Man who walked with God”
 - First Enoch (1st century BC to 3rd century AD)
 - Most helpful for tradition of angels
 - Second Enoch

- Describes 7 heavens and roles of angels in each
- Enoch arrives at 7th heaven; told by Michael to take off his earthly clothing, anoints him with oil, dresses him in “clothes of glory.” (2 Enoch:22.8). He becomes an angel.
- Third Enoch
 - Rabbi Ishmael guided through levels of heaven by Enoch, now angel Metatron (3 Enoch 4.2-3)
- Book of Jubilees (mid 2nd century BC)
 - Interprets Biblical story from Adam to Moses
 - Organized to fit major Jewish religious festivals
 - Includes creation of angels, importance of Sabbath
 - Adds death of Adam and death of Cain (house falls on him)
 - Angels and demons described throughout
 - Describes laws for Sabbath and Passover
- Life of Adam and Eve (1st century AD)
 - “midrash”: story that fills in gaps of biblical narrative
 - story of Satan’s fall
 - more detail on temptation of humans
 - details of Adam and Eve’s life after Eden

Classic Literary Sources (see Nowell, p.38)

- Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1265-1321)
 - Describes choirs of angels as concentric circles whirling around pure light of God
 - Seraphim and cherubim greatest speed and intensity
 - Others less bright depending on distance from God
- Shakespeare (1564-1616)
 - *Macbeth*: “Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell”
 - *Hamlet*: “Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”
- John Donne
 - Calls for the angels to blow their trumpets at the last judgment and raise the dead
- Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667)
 - Archangels involvement in creation events
 - Gabriel: drives Satan out of Eden after 1st unsuccessful attempt to tempt Eve
 - Raphael: tells Adam story of fall of rebel angels; warns him not to eat forbidden fruit
 - Michael: expels Adam and Eve from Eden; also promises Messiah

The Hierarchy of Angels

- Describes how the Godhead and angels operate in the universe
- Many attempts and revisions over the centuries

Pseudo-Dionysius

- *Celestial Hierarchy, AD 500*
 - Most accepted overall
 - See **Basics of Spiritual Reality: Session Two** for descriptions
 - *First Hierarchy:* Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones
 - *Second Hierarchy:* Dominions, Virtues, Powers
 - *Third Hierarchy:* Principalities, Archangels, Angels
 - Most discussed; interactions of angels and humans

Archangels (only ones with proper names)

Roman/Anglican	Lutheran	Reformed Protestant	Greek
Michael	Michael	Michael	Michael
Gabriel	Gabriel	Gabriel	Gabriel
Raphael	Raphael		Raphael
(Uriel)			Uriel
(Phanuel)			Sealtiel
(Zarachiel)			Jegudiel
(Simiel)			Barachiel
			Jeremiel

- Top three most dealt with:
 - Michael: “One who is like God”
 - Battles and defeats dragon; sometimes confused with St. George in art
 - Gabriel: “Strength of God”
 - Heavenly announcements, including final trumpet
 - Raphael: “Medicine of God”
 - Heals Tobit’s blindness

Angels

For every story attributing to a guardian angel rescue from physical harm or danger, there are dozens in which injury or death come with no angel arriving to help the victim.
The Christian faith does not promise exemption from the laws of nature or from all suffering, but it does promise hope for a resurrected life free of pain and death beyond the present. (Patella, p.69)

Guardian Angels

- Scriptural and non-Christian roots
 - Bible:
 - Jesus speaking of children: “for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matt 18:10)
 - Peter’s escape in *Acts of the Apostles*: They said, “It is his angel.”
 - Greek:
 - Each individual has a personal spirit, either good or bad
- Primary purpose: spiritual assistance in temptation or demonic assaults
 - No force can overcome free will
 - We are not forced to cooperate with grace

Your Guardian Angel makes the promises of Christ personal, even as those promises are universal and are made to the whole of creation. The ministry of angels is not independent of the Lord God’s supreme reign over the universe. The angels’ involvement with the world is yet another way we experience Christ’s ministry. (Patella, p.70)

