

BACKGROUND

1. Age of enlightenment - doubt everything. Come to doubt supernatural. Recently new interest- Hollywood- *Touched by an Angel*, movies. Many ideas about angels have been presented from the New Age movement and the mass media and many are contrary to Catholic belief.
2. Jewish tradition and early Christian authors maintained that the Old Testament was communicated to the Jews through the medium of the angels? What about Moses? Divine Inspiration by the Holy Spirit?

1. WHAT IS AN ANGEL?

A spiritual "messenger" (From the Greek *angelos*) Jewish tradition with the exception of the Sadducees (cf. CCC 328-36; Pius XII)

- a. Spiritual, non-corporeal beings
- b. Nature-what they are: "spirit"; Office-what they do, is "angel" (St. Augustine)
- c. Servants and Messengers of God
- d. Personal and Immortal: surpassing in perfection all visible creatures
- e. Sons of elohim, sons of elim, sons of God, ministers of God's will

2. ANGELIC HIERARCHY OR ANGELIC CHOIR

(Eph 1:21; Col 1:16; 1 Cor 15:24; Rom 8:38). St JP II affirmed in general audience 6 Aug 1986.

- a. **Seraphim** (Isa 6:2,6) Hebrew seraph: to burn. Have six wings. Two cover the face as a token of profound reverence and in order not to be seen, two cover their feet out of modesty and respect and two they fly with. Stand upon the throne where the Lord is sitting. Sing without ceasing to God. Purge Isaiah's lips with fire . Spirits of love.
- b. **Cherubim** (Gen 3:24; Exod 25:18; Sir 49:10; Ezek 10:1-22) KeRUBH-Assyrian word adopted by Hebrews. Are heavenly custodians and protectors of holy places and things. In Genesis protect the tree of life. Had two images in the Tabernacle to represent them as guardians. Are the throne bearers of God. Describe God as sitting on the Cherubim (Ps 79/80:2; 98/99:1). In Ezek they make up a chariot.
- c. **Thrones** (Col 1:16) Lowest choir of the first Hierarchy.
- d. **Dominions** (Col 1:16) First place in the second Hierarchy
- e. **Virtues** (1 Peter 3:22; Eph 1:21, 1 Cor 15:24) Listed as good (Eph 1:21) and bad (1 Cor 15:24).
- f. **Authorities** or **Powers** (Dan 3:61; Col 1:16; 1 Pet 3:22) Last Choir of the second hierarchy. Listed as good (Eph 3:10) and bad (Eph 6:12).
- g. **Principalities** (Col 1:16, Eph 1:21) are the leaders of the last order, and direct the actual implementation of God's will (Aquinas I, 108).
- h. **Archangels** (1Thess 4:16) actually carry out and execute what is to be done. Best known because of missions of Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.
- i. **Angels** Close to man. God made man "a little less than the Angels (Ps 8:6).

3. ANGELS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- a. An angel promises Abraham that his descendants will be as countless as the stars of the sky and in his "descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing" (Gen 22:15-18)
- b. The wife of Manoah (mother of Samson) learns from an angel that she will have a son (Jud 13:3).
- c. Guided the people of Israel on their Exodus journey (Exod 23:20, 33:2; Num 20:16).
- d. Kept Balaam from cursing God's people (Num 22:31-32)
- e. Defeated the Assyrians (2 Kgs 19:35)
- f. Led the forces of Maccabees and punished Heliodorus (2 Macc 3:24-27).
- g. Brought the Law of Moses (Gal 3:19; Heb 2.2).

4. ANGELS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- a. Announces the birth of the Messiah to Mary (Lk 1:26-38).
- b. Appears to Joseph (Matt 1:20; 2:13-19).
- c. Announces the birth of John to Baptist to Zechariah (Lk 1:11, 19-20)
- d. Announces the birth of Christ to the shepherds (Lk 2:9, 15).
- e. Minister to Jesus in the desert (Matt 4:11) and in the Garden (Lk 22:43).
- f. Roll back the stone of the tomb and announce Jesus is risen (Matt 28:2-7).
- g. Release Peter and John from prison (Acts 5:19).
- h. Angels dwell in heaven or in light (Gal 1:8; 2 Cor 11:14)
- i. Present during Christian Liturgy (1 Cor 11:10)
- j. Will accompany Christ at the Parousia (2 Thess 1:7)
- k. Archangel will announce the Resurrection of the Dead (1 Thess 4:16)

5. ROLE OF FALLEN ANGELS

- a. Enemies of Christians, Opponents of Christians (Eph 6:12)
- b. Seek Our Damnation (Rom 8:38)
- c. Will Ultimately Be Defeated (1 Cor 15:25)

SPECIFIC MISSIONS

1. **Mission of angels among men:** “they assist man in the pursuit of his final end that they are the ministers of the gifts of God in the natural order as well as the supernatural” (Heb 1:14, Danielou p4).
2. **The Ten Commandments** Jewish Tradition and later Christian authors maintain that the whole economy of the Old Testament was communicated to the Jews through the medium of angels. Clement of Alexandria says (first operating) angels make this happen through the medium of other angels. (Clement of Alexandria Eclog., 51).

Transmission of *The Law* or *The Ten Commandments*:

- a. In Greek Septuagint, Deuteronomy 33:2 says: “At his right hand the angels accompanied him” vs “at his right hand advanced the gods.”
- b. The book of *Jubilees* has Yahweh confiding to the angel of the presence (probably Michael, the protector angel of Israel) the composition and promulgation of the Law. “Yahweh said to the angel of the presence, ‘Write for Moses since the beginning of creation up unto the building of my sanctuary among them for eternity’ (Jub., 1, 27).
- c. “It is from God, through angels, that we have learned the most beautiful of our doctrines and the most holy sections of our laws.” (Josephus, Ant. Jud., 15, 5,3).
- d. Paul says “Why then was the Law? It was added for transgressions,... it was promulgated by angels at the hand of a mediator” (Gal 3:19).
- e. In the Acts of the Apostles Stephen declares: “You have received the Law as an ordinance of angels and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53).
- f. In Hebrews speaks of “the word announced through the angels,” to designate the Mosaic Law in opposition to “the message announced by the Lord” (Heb 2:2-3).
- g. St Hiliary says: “Among the [Jewish] people there was a spiritual watch at that time by which the administration of the Law procured through the angels was safeguarded” (Hil tract Ps 54).
- h. St Hiliary comments on Ps 67 talks about the angels present on Sinai for the promulgation of the Law: “These burning torches, these dazzling fires, these rumbling thunders, this terror accompanies the entire coming of the Lord- all manifest the presence of the angelic ministers, setting down the Law through the Hand of a mediator.” (Hil tract Ps 67).
- i. Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Celestial Hierarchy*: “Just as theology teaches, the Law was transmitted to us by the angels. In the days before the Law, just as under the Law itself, it was the angels who guided our revered ancestors toward divine realities...Some may object, ‘Scriptural tradition affirms that the holy precepts of the Law were transmitted directly by God himself to Moses.’ We answer that this is said in order to make it absolutely impossible for us to forget that these prescriptions are really the image of

the divine and sacred Law. But theology wisely teaches that these prescriptions have come to us through the intermediary of the angels, so that the very order instituted by the divine Legislator might show us that inferior beings are to rise spiritually toward the divine through the intermediary of beings who are hierarchically superior.” (Hier. Coel., 4, 2, 3).

3. Preparatory Mission of the Old Testament For the early Christians, the role of angels was tied to the preparatory mission of the Old Testament and that mission ceases with the coming of Christ who takes the history of salvation directly into his own hands.

a. Old Covenant: The Religion of Angels?

- i. According to Jewish tradition, angels stand in charge of the physical elements and seasonal cycles of the world (Book of Jubilee 2.2)
- ii. As long as the heir is a child, he is under guardians and stewards. So we too, when we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe” i.e. Angels (Gal 4:3, 8-11).
- iii. Origin: Old Covenant Liturgy: a shadow of “what is to come.”

b. New Covenant: The Religion of Christ

- i. “For he has not subjected to angels the world to come, whereof we speak... But, in subjecting all things to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him” (Heb 2:5-8).
- ii. “through God you are no longer a slave but a son” of the Father (Gal 4:5-7).
- iii. Christ has set you free; do not submit again (Gal 5:1).
- iv. Origin commenting on Gal 3:19 explains how the friends of the Bridegroom are the angels who instruct the Church- the people of God (the Hebrews) during their time of espousals, the Old Testament. But the Church longs for the kiss of the bridegroom.
- v. There is a parallel between the OT and angels and the NT and Christ which is well developed by Origin in his comment on Canticle 1:10:

We will make three chains of gold, inlaid with silver. (He is comparing the Old Testament signified by silver, with the spiritual reality of the Gospel signified by gold). We propose to show how the holy angels who before the coming of Christ, watched over the bride while she was still young and the friends and companions of the Bridegroom mentioned here... In fact, it seems to me that the Law which was promulgated through the agency of a mediator did indeed contain a foreshadowing of good things which were to come, but not their actual likeness; and that the events set down in the Law and enacted in figure though not in reality are merely imitations of gold, not real gold. Among these imitations are the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, the Cherubim... the Temple itself and everything which is written in the Law. It is these imitations which were given to the Church, the bride, by the angels, who are the friends of the Bridegroom and who served her in the Law and the other mysteries. That I believe, is what St Paul meant when he spoke of the ‘worship of the angels which some enter into blindly, puffed up by their mere human minds’ (Col 2:18). Thus, the entire cult and the religion of the Jews were imitations of the gold.

- vi. For Origin, the cult of angels mentioned above is merely another name for Judaism itself, since it was promulgated by the angels.
- vii. Hence Judaism was provisional-“That which was procured through the angels, since it was only an imitation of the gold, did not have the promise of lasting forever.

c. Christ vs Angels

- i. “Elemental Spirits of the Universe” vs. “Christ”
- ii. Supremacy of Christ over the Angels
- iii. New Covenant: circumcision “made without hands”

iv. The Crucifixion: the disarmament of “the principalities and powers”!

4. Angels “served the people of Israel in the Law and in other mysteries”(Origin Comm. In Cant., 2)

- a. *Manna was given by the angels: According to St Hiliary: “ The Law was promulgated by the angels, and man has eaten the bread of angels, and the heavens are said to have diffused their dew on Sinai; certainly it is by the heavens—that is to say, by the angels—that the manna was bestowed on Sinai.”* (Hil. Tract. Ps 67).
- b. From the book of Wisdom: “Thou didst feed thy people with the food of angels and gavest them bread from heaven prepared without labor, having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste.” (Wis 16:20)
- c. “That is why we see Christ, the true Israel, being served by angels in the desert after the forty days of temptation, which correspond to the forty years of the Exodus (Mark 1:13; Danielou 8).
- d. Angels not only communicated the Law to Israel but also ensured its authentic interpretation according to St Hiliary (Tract, Ps 54).
- e. At the crucifixion the protective watch of the angel is removed from the temple (Meliton of Sardis – Homily on the Pascha, 98 and St Hiliary- Comm. in Matt 33:7).

5. Formation of the Soul

Another point of parallelism Origin mentions is the role of the angels in the historical preparation of Christ and their role in the first formation of the soul.

“If we explain the passage as referring to the soul, it must appear that, as long as the soul is still young and not fully formed, it is under guardians and teachers. These are the angels who are called the guardians of children and who always see the face of the Father in heaven. Accordingly, they are imitations of gold given to the soul which is not yet sustained with the solid nourishment of the Word.” (Origin Comm in Cant., 1).

6. Assigned to Nations

Prior to his covenant with Abraham, God made a covenant with Noah after the great flood symbolized by the rainbow. Paul in his teaching to the Romans stresses how the pagans should recognize the existence of God through the laws of nature (Rom 1:20). Another Jewish doctrine was that God entrusted the nations to his angels.

- a. Greek translation of Deuteronomy-“When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the angels of God” (Deut 32:8).
- b. The Book of Daniel talks about the angels of Greece and Persia (Dan 10:13-21).
- c. The Jewish Apocalypses, and Philo of Alexandria were familiar with this doctrine.
- d. Acts 17:26 talks about how the entire human family stems from Adam and how God made 70 nations spring from the sons of Noah, although it does not mention angels specifically.
- e. Clement of Alexandria- “The presiding powers of the angels have been distributed according to the nations and the cities” and “The angels have been apportioned among the nations according to an ancient and divine degree.”(Clement, Strom., 6,17).
- f. St Basil “That there are some angels set at the head of entire nations is the teaching of Moses when he speaks in his canticle” (Deut 32:8).
- g. Pseudo-Dionysius “Theology has apportioned to the angels all things which pertain to us, naming Michael the angel of Israel... and giving other names to the angels of the other nations”(Hier. coel., 9, 2).

7. Nation Mission

The angels' mission to the nations had to do with their protection and temporal assistance. They had a role in the natural revelation of God.

- a. Pseudo-Dionysius - "The angels entrusted with the sacred care of each nation lifted up all those who wanted to follow them toward the one single universal principle"(Hier. coel., 9, 3). It is their mission to lead the pagan peoples to God.
- b. All pagan religions, no matter how perverted have some vestige of natural revelation and this is thought to be secondary to the angels.
- c. Clement compared the role of angels communicating the Law to the Jews to their role of delivering philosophy to the Greeks: "The divine power procures all manner of visible goods for us through the angels. This method of operation is manifest in the covenants of the Jews, the legislation of the Greeks, and the teachings of philosophy"(Stom., 6, 17). He also says: "God gave philosophy to the Greeks by means of the lower angels. In fact, in accordance with a divine and ancient order, the nations have been distributed among the angels" (Strom., 7,2).
- d. Origin says the astrology of the Chaldeans came from the angels. Can interpret this that the knowledge of God is revealed through the contemplation of the star-filled heavens. Note Abraham was a Chaldean before his conversion- he adored the true God as he beheld him in the star filled heavens (Gregory of Nyssa, Contra Eun., 12).

8. Lead Nations to God

Angels charged with leading the nations toward the one true God. They were not very successful. All the religions of the world before Christ, except Judaism, contain bits of truth but for the most part were corrupt.

- a. Pseudo-Dionysius- "the angels fulfilled their office of guardians with perfect honesty, and that it is not their fault if the other nations went astray into the cult of false gods. For it was these nations themselves, of their own impulse, which abandoned the right way of spiritual ascent toward the divine. Their foolish worship of things which they thought possessed a certain divinity clearly shows their egoism and their presumption"(Hier. coel., 9, 3).
- b. There were exceptions. Melchizedek, king of Salem during the time of Abraham, a Gentile yet a priest most pleasing to God, a priest of the one true God.
- c. Obstacles to the activity of the angels was the evil will of men and the activity of the demons.

9. Guardian Angels

- a. In Genesis 19, angels are executors of God's wrath against Sodom and Gomorrah, but deliver Lot from danger.
- b. In Ex 32:34 God tells Moses to lead his people "My angel will go before you."
- c. St Basil wrote "It is the teaching of Moses that every believer has an angel to guide him" based on Gene 48:16.
- d. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father" (M 18:10)
- e. In Act 12, an angel of the Lord rescues Peter from prison and when he shows up at the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, they think that Peter is his angel (Acts 12:15).
- f. Other terms used for guardian angel are guard, protector, superintendent and overseer, assistant.

10. So does everyone get a guardian angel or only those that are baptized?

- a. St Thomas reasoned that man receives a guardian angel at birth, but that this angel plays an entirely new role after baptism. (Summa Theologica, I, 113, 5 and CCC 336).
- b. So at birth, every person has a guardian angel. But from the first day of life, a child becomes a prey of the devil. The guardian angel is almost powerless over him, just as over the nations.
- c. The coming of Christ changes the situation. Origin: "You too were the lot of some prince. Then Jesus came and snatched you from the perverse power. Indeed, each of us has an adversary who seeks to draw us into the ranks of his own leader" (Origin, Hom. In Luc., 35).
- d. Origin: "When a man has received the Faith, Christ who has redeemed him by his blood from his masters entrusts him, since hereafter he is to believe in God, to a holy angel who, because of his great purity, always sees the face of the Father"(Origin, Comm. in Matt., 13,28).
- e. Guardian angels have three main functions: preach-they protect the soul against troubles from within and without; penitence- they reprimand and punish the soul that turns aside from the right way; prayer-assist at prayer and transmit petitions to God.
- f. Gregory of Nyssa: "After our nature had fallen in sin, we were not abandoned in our fall by God, but an angel, one of the beings who have an incorporeal nature, was set up to aid the life of each of us. The destroyer of our nature, in his turn, did just the same by sending us an evil, pernicious angel to the detriment of human nature" (Life of Moses, PG 44, 337)
- g. St Jerome on his commentary on Mat 8:10, says: "The dignity of human souls is great, for each has an angel appointed to guard it." God's providence extends, not tonly to mankind as a whole, but to individual human beings. Each human being has, by God's loving providence, his own guardian angel."
- h. Each human has a guardian angel during his whole earthly life. In heaven a person will have an angel companion to reign with him, but not a guardian. In hell, each person will have a fallen angel to punish him. (Summa Theologica I, 113, 4). If we go to purgatory, our Guardian Angel will wait in heaven, and then come to escort us to paradise once our time in that place of punishment is finished.
- i. The guardian angel is a gift from God. The angel never fails or forsakes his charge. Sometimes, in the workings of providence, a man must suffer trouble; this is not prevented by the guardian angel.
- j. Guardian angels do not griever over the ills that befall their wards. All angels uninterruptedly enjoy the beatific vision and are forever filled with joy and happiness. Guardian angels do not will the sin which their wards commit, nor do they directly will the punishment of this sin; they do will the fulfillment of divine justice which requires that a person be allowed to have his way, to commit sin if he so chooses, to endure trials and troubles, and to suffer punishment. (Summa Theologica I, q. 113, a. 7).
- k. The practice of assigning names to Angels should be discouraged, except in the cases of Gabriel, Raphael and Michael whose names are contained in Holy Scripture. (Congregation of Divine Worship and the Sacraments, *The Directory of Popular Piety*, n 217, 2001)
- l. Aquinas states in no uncertain terms that "angels do not know the secrets of hearts" (Summa Theologica, I, 57, 4).
- m. If you commit a mortal sin your Guardian angel will not abandon you, although our relationship will be damaged. The capacity of our Guardian Angel to help us will be severely limited.

References

1. *The Angels and Their Mission* by Jean Danielou, S.J.
2. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*.
3. New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia www.newadvent.org