



Angels and Angelology: The Ministering Spirits and Elect ‘sons of God’

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Abstract

Jesus Christ is central to Christianity as God and Saviour and He taught concerning the existence of angels, so as Orthodox Christians we ought to embrace the belief in angels. This article approaches the themes from a mainly Orthodox perspective and contends that angels are important, not only as part of a prescriptive Biblical world-view, but also as creatures serving God. Angelology or the study of angels such as this one, is part of systematic theology and is a key category of theology in Orthodoxy and Catholicism. It is metaphysical in that it studies being and all reality in the physical and spiritual realms. Angels as God’s agents, are considered from a biblical vantage point and the teachings of early Church Fathers who believed that God fashioned the angels long before He created the observable world. It is clear from Holy Scripture that angels protect people under the authority of the creator. Angels are non-corporeal despite manifesting at times in human form. They are messengers and ambassadors of the Most High. Their core function is to devote their existence to doing God’s will and they are assigned various missions on earth. They play a crucial role in reconciling fallen humanity with God as they praise Him and call on people to worship and adore Him. Angels are ordered in specific ranks in which diverse roles are played by them. As Orthodox adherents we believe they have been with us since the very creation and have helped to guide the Church as the ‘Bride of Christ’ who is its head. Angels will play an essential role when Christ returns at the Second Coming. People can be elevated above angels by responding to God’s saving work and may even get to judge angels. There are also fallen angels, headed by Lucifer, thus they are not infallible. Either way, angels form part of a significant component of divine revelation and should never be ignored. Angels should not be worshipped but rather venerated for their excellence as ministering spirits and servants of the Most High. According to Orthodoxy, human beings in the Christian faith need to make the Holy Bible, Holy Tradition and teachings of the early Church Fathers, their authority on all matters of spirituality and seek the support of the *Paraclete*. In African traditional cosmology (ATC) there is a shared spiritual belief in ancestors, which is also worth briefly touching on. A study such as this then serves to widen our understanding of God, and how He operates in His Creation.

Keywords: Angelology, spiritual beings, bodiless, invisible, faith.



Introduction

While there are many instances of angels and their mysterious roles in the Holy Bible and in other religious works of the early Church Fathers, the subject of angels has not attracted much attention until the last four or so decades. The early Church Fathers had a very firm belief in the existence of a spiritual world as it is stated in the first article of the Nicene Creed in the words "...all things visible and invisible". By these two terms is meant the angels and the human soul (Mother Alexandra, 1987; Nicolaidis, 2006). The word angel is not generic. It is derived from the Greek *ἄγγελος* and it denotes either a human or heavenly messenger. In the first denotation such as in "To the angel of the church in ..." the term relates to the messengers of the seven churches (Revelation 2-3). Angels are in this sense a special messenger or delegation of people to the church such as in an instructing elder. The term as used in the Hebrew Bible, *mal'ak*, מַלְאָךְ means "emissary" and then refers to an angel and the term simply means the 'one who is sent'. They are 'one sent from Him' (*qadowsh*). Either way it relates to one that is sent. Some of the earliest sources interpret the "sons of God" as being angels and others maintain the term refers to impartial and devout men, and the kings of Israel who were also termed as being "sons of God" (Exodus 4:2, Aherne, 1912). Thus in Holy Scripture angels are often portrayed as men. Angels are referred to 196 times in the Holy Bible, 103 times in the Old Testament and 93 times in the New Testament. They are however cited a total of 273 times in the Holy Bible as well as other ancient accounts (Berry, 2017). Their mention is generally supplementary to other issues and they are not treated in themselves.

In the New Testament with the exceptions of Luke 7:24 9:22 and most likely in Revelation it refers to only heavenly beings. The word 'angel' points to a special Order of Heavenly Powers and it was used at times to signify any spiritual existence. In the Bible, angels cannot be perceived by humans except if God reveals them as in inter alia Numbers 22:31 and 2 Kings 6:17 in the Old Testament, and Luke 2:13 in the New Testament. Thus from time to time angels assumed a bodily form and appeared to various people in Scripture (Matthew 28:5; Hebrews 13:2). In the last forty or so years there has been a move towards demythologizing angels as being human representatives of a native congregation but there is nonetheless confirmation of an extensive belief in the actuality of spiritual guardians supervising local congregations in the early Church (Wink, 1986). Angels are the servants of the Lord undertaking service to the Creator (Hebrews 1:7,14) and they are His messengers and carry out His will (Genesis 19:15; Genesis 28:12). In Daniel 4:35, they are spoken of as God's militia, the "Heavenly Host". They are known by various appellations including the "Holy Ones" or "Holy angels" (Daniel 4:7; Matthew 25:31), the "Sons of God" (Job 1:6; 2:1); the "Heavenly Host" (Luke 2:13), as the "Watchers" (Daniel 4,17). There are also malevolent angels and spirits (see Psalms 78:49; 1 Samuel 16:14,15; 1 Kings 22:2).

Angels are created by God (Nehemiah 9:6; Colossians 1:16) and are spiritual beings and are distinct from human beings (St. John of Damascus, Book II). In Ephesians 3:10, we read that angels are taught wisdom as they observe God's unfolding plan in His Church (Jefferey,1996). They are created and sent by God to people to serve His will as it relates to the salvation of the human race. He declares:

He is Himself the Maker and Creator of the angels: for He brought them out of nothing into being and created them after His own image, an incorporeal race, a sort of spirit or immaterial fire: in the words of the divine David, He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire(3): and He has described their lightness and the ardour, and heat, and keenness and sharpness with which they hunger for God and serve Him, and how they are borne to the regions above and are quite delivered from all material thought(4). An angel, then, is an intelligent essence, in



perpetual motion, with free-will, incorporeal, ministering to God, having obtained by grace an immortal nature: and the Creator alone knows the form and limitation of its essence. But all that we can understand is, that it is incorporeal and immaterial. For all that is compared with God Who alone is incomparable, we find to be dense and material. For in reality only the Deity is immaterial and incorporeal. (St. John of Damascus, Book II).

Judaism and the early Church Fathers had various opinions and beliefs regarding angels and these are not generally considered to be dogma by the Church. They have contestable opinions that cannot be disputed in any way. They are thus personal opinions on the doctrine of the heavenly hierarchy which is a mystery. Human souls and angels as pure spirit beings are often confused with one another as they are equally immaterial. A Jewish account describes how humans were made from earth and angels from light. Further they both were brought to life by the breath of God, thus sharing in the same source of life. Many materialists do not believe in angels as they deny the existence of a soul and spirit beings. Thus, if there is no spirit there can be no God. But the supernatural does exist and science cannot disprove that it or angels exist in any way (Kreeft, 1995). We are told the angels provide service since “Some of them stand before the Great God, while others by their action support the whole world” (St. Gregory the Theologian, 1987).

A number of the early Church Fathers consider the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth", and they understood the word "heaven" as denoting the imperceptible heaven, the domain of the angels. In essence they also agree that God created the angels long before the discernable world and that at the time when the physical cosmos was fashioned, the angels were already standing before the face of God and served Him (St. Gregory the Great, Homily 32; Kuehn & Baggaly, 2007). Irenaeus says that "...the Word became the Creator of the Angels" (Tatianus, *Homily to the Greeks*). St. Gregory writes "...God first thought of the angelic heavenly powers, and thought became act, carried out by the Word and fulfilled by the Spirit. As His first creation was pleasing to Him, He then devised another world, material and visible, and a well-balanced unity between heaven and earth and that which is between them" (St. Gregory the Great, Homily 32). Athenagoras in his work *Deputation* asserts that angels are the creation of God (Athenagoras, *Deputation*). St. Dionysius the Areopagite (1920) relates that "An angel is an image of God, a manifestation of the invisible light, a burnished mirror, bright, untarnished, without spot or blemish, receiving (if it is reverent to say so), all the beauty of the absolute goodness, and (so far as may be) kindling in itself, with unalloyed radiance, the goodness of the secret silence".

Barth maintains that angels are not God but they are rather His modest agents and offer an expose and revelation of God (Barth, 1961). St. Augustine said that "'Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'; if you seek the name of their office, it is 'angel': from what they are, 'spirit', from what they do, 'angel'" (St. Augustine, 1888). St. John of Damascus explains: "An angel can only be called incorporeal and non-material in comparison with us. For in comparison with God, Who alone, is beyond compare, everything seems coarse and material, only the divinity is totally non-material -and incorporeal." St. Basil the Great in his Homily on Psalm 43, states that Christians are greatly advantaged because angels can act upon our senses (I:111:4) and also in our imaginations (I:111:3) but they cannot make any decisions for us since we have free will (Lossky, 1976). St. Basil the Great the angels were an unquestionable fact and he states "...the birth of the world was preceded by a condition of things suitable for exercise of supernatural powers, outstripping the limits of time, eternal and infinite" (St. Basil the Great, *The Hexameron*). St. Gregory the Theologian stresses that "Each of them has received under his control some particular part of the universe, or is attached to some



particular thing or person in the world, as is known to Him Who arranges and orders all things, and all work towards one goal, by command of the Builder of all things”.

In the Symbol of Faith of the Orthodox church we find the following "I believe in One God...the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible". The imperceptible, angelic world was fashioned by God before the perceptible world. "When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me with a loud voice" (Job 38:7). The angels were created between the first two “days” of Creation, when God separated the heavens from the earth. The purpose of the angels was to keep the creation close to the creator. One of the angels was named Lucifer, and sought to become God. So the angels warred with one another and Lucifer (Satan) and the angels loyal to him were cast out of heaven according to Orthodoxy. Clement of Alexandria tells us “...and the Angels and men are the works of God’s fingers” (Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*).

St. Dionysius the Areopagite states: “An angel is an image of God, a manifestation of the invisible light, a burnished mirror, bright, untarnished, without spot or blemish, receiving (if it is reverent to say so), all the beauty of the absolute goodness, and (so far as may be) kindling in itself, with unalloyed radiance, the goodness of the secret silence” (cited in Mother Alexandra, 2019).

Angels are called “sons of God” since they were created by God (Job 1:6). The angels praise God. In Job 38:7 we read, "When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me with a loud voice". Angels are contained within in accounts of all that God has created (Psalm 148:2). The name ‘angel’ is related to their role as functionaries in the salvation of humanity (Origen, *Against Celsus*). Angels are also ambassadors and serve in God’s heavenly court. (St John Chrysostom, *Concerning the unintelligible*). The same early Church Father states that God “...who is needless created the Angels, Archangels and the rest of the bodiless essences...because of His goodness” and not His need to do so since “...the Divine is needless” (St. John Chrysostom, *To Stageirion 1*). In a close reading of Daniel 7:10, Psalm 68:17, Hebrews 12:22, and also Revelation 5:11, it is evident that millions of angels were fashioned by the Creator. Gregory of Nazianzus supposed that angels were created as 'spirits' and 'flames of fire', following Hebrews 1, and that they can be recognized as being in the order of angels as the 'thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities' of Colossians 1 (Muehlberger, 2013). "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life" (St. Basil the Great, *Adversus Eunomium*).

In Exodus 12-13, an angel is the selected to be the leader of the host of Israel, and in 32:34, God says to Moses: "my angel shall go before thee." In Deuteronomy we read that on Mount Sinai God “...The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them. came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand” (Deuteronomy 33:2). Furthermore, we find that “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.” (Psalm 68:17). In Psalm 91:11 we read: “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” In Exodus 23:20, God says to the Israelites: “Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared”. In Daniel 10 we read that angels were delegated with caring for certain districts; one is called "prince of the kingdom of the Persians", and Michael is termed "one of the chief princes"; (cf. Deuteronomy 32:8; Ecclesiasticus 17:17 (Septuagint)).

Some examples from the New Testament include “...But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22). Jesus refers to angels and says, “See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). In the Book of Acts, we read of personal angels when Peter is liberated



from jail and arrives at the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, they say to the servant that informs them that it can't be true and, "It must be his angel" (Acts 12:12-15). Revelation speaks of myriads of angels "...And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;" (Revelation 5:11).

Angels just like human beings are creatures, but they differ with humans in that they are wholly spiritual creations and cannot thus die (Luke 20:36). In a cultural understanding of reality this could well be different. In Orthodoxy it is taken as fact. Jesus is also referred to as "...the Angel of the Covenant" (Malachi 3:1-3). Hebrews 1:14 asks "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?". Angels thus have a very specific mission and in heaven this includes praising God (Revelation 5:12) and their total existence is to serve God and to do His will (Psalm 103:120). Angels are able to see God's face (Matthew 18:10). Because they serve God in their functionary roles, priests, prophets and bishops also often had the name 'angel' ascribed to them (Malachi 2:7; Revelation 2:1,8,12,18:3:1,7,14; Haggai 1:13). It is clear from scripture that angels also have various missions on earth and they accompany God in His creation (Job 38:7). *Inter alia*, Angels are sent to support people (Acts 12:7-10), to protect certain people and also to impose punishment at times (2 Kings 6:15-18; 1 Chronicles 21:16). They have been dispensed to children and even nations and churches (Matthew 18:10; Daniel 12:1; Revelation 1:20; 3:1,7,14). They will also be at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:31).

In essence, God's revelation never intends to inform one concerning the nature of angels but rather, their mentioning is continually to increasingly inform us about God, and in what manner he does things (Millard, 1983). Saint John of Damascus states: "God is Himself the Maker and Creator of the angels; for He brought them out of nothing into being and created them after His own image. They are an incorporeal race, a sort of spirit or immaterial fire, even as the divine David says that "His angels are spirits...and His ministers a flame of fire" (Psalm 103:6). Nehemiah 9: 6 tells us "You are the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host . . . and the host of heaven worships you". Paul informs us "By Him all things created that are in heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" (Colossians 1:16).

There is much speculation regarding angels. Saint Thomas Aquinas offers us an interesting perspective. Saint Thomas Aquinas (13th Century), is commonly referred to as an 'Angelic Doctor' *Doctor Angelicus*, because in *inter alia* his *Summa Theologiae*, he deliberates on the nature, activities and moral state of angels. He offers a complete scientifically arranged elucidation of theology and at the same time gives us a summary of Christian philosophy and guides us on how to think lucidly about the angels. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, he relates angels to Aristotle's metaphysics because in his five proofs for the existence of God he accepts some of Aristotle's declarations regarding principles of being. The notion of God as *prima causa* ("first cause") is based on Aristotle's concept of the unmoved mover and he proclaims that God is the ultimate cause of all things including angels (Healy, 2003). In his work *De substantiis separatis*, he makes suggestions in a dissertation on angelology (Torrell, 2005). Aquinas asserts that the perfection of the universe necessitates the existence of intellectual creatures and because God intends only the good for His creation, it must be godlike and then comprise something with intellect and will including angels. The excellence of the cosmos requires that there must be knowledgeable creatures and incorporeal creatures. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that angels can inspire our thoughts and imaginations, as they "...enlighten the mind and change the will." (ST 1a, 1, Question 111, 1-4.) Aquinas also used the nature of the angels to illuminate the nature of human



reasoning by referring to angels as being the most extreme of what is possible for a human rational nature to be. For him then, 'divine science' has the intellectual tools including belief in Holy Scripture which allows us to establish both the fact of angels and their nature (ST 1a, 1, Question 111, 6). Irrespective, while angels are more intellectual than humans, they are not omniscient, (von Heijne, 2015), as also stated in Matthew 24:36.

Barth (1968) maintained that angels have an interceding role: "A world without angels would be a world without wonder. A theology without angels is theology without mystery, and if our theology cannot accommodate the mystery of (heaven and the angels), in the end it will fail to accommodate God" (Lindsay, 2017). Biblically speaking there are many explanations of what angels are and see to. Hebrews 1:14 explains "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" So one of their roles is to lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 22:30 informs us "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." So, when we are resurrected when the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead we will be like the angels but will not be angels. In our lives, humans are "lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:7). However, at the Second Coming of the Lord, the faithful will be raised higher than the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). Christian writers such as Evagrius Ponticus Praktikos warn us against pursuing the notion of being able to have visions of angels. He asserts "Do not desire to see sensibly, angels or powers or Christ, lest you become entirely delirious, accepting the wolf instead of the shepherd and worshipping the demon-enemy" (Osborn, 1994; Géhin, 2017). Evagrius further teaches us that "The holy angels urge us to prayer, and stand by us rejoicing, and pray for us". Their purpose is to then direct us beyond themselves to God and in the Orthodox faith they call us to prayer (Meyendorff, 1983; Osborn, 1994). St. Jerome articulated: "How great the dignity of the soul, since each one has from his birth an angel commissioned to guard it" (Saltet, 1910). There are nonetheless however many questions concerning angels that are impossible to answer. (Macy, 2011). The 35th Canon of the Council of Laodicea in the 4thC CE denounced as heretical the worship of angels as 'gods and rulers of the world' but acknowledged their appropriate reverence. In the Revelation of St. John there is frequent mention of the angels of the seven Churches (Revelation 1:20). Jesus addresses each of these angels in turn: "To the angel of the Ephesian Church write that... And to the angel of the Smyrnanian Church write that...". We are not in a Kantian world of experience of "phenomena" that prevent us from accessing ultimate realities or even causal basic realities or "noumena". The creation of man in the image of God, and his recreation in Christ as well as his transfiguration and his ultimate glory are all, symbolically, present in icons and many of these display images of angels as well (Nicolaidis, 2014; 2009a; 2006).

The Nature of Angels

The truths about angels can stimulate faith in God and open our minds relating to the next world. Angels belong to God (Psalms 104:4) and are His creatures (Psalm 148: 2, 5). Angels are essentially regarded as incarnations of their divine mission and are spiritual beings. We are nonetheless told in Job 15:15 that God "...putteth no trust in his holy ones". At certain times they have been erroneously being understood to be men (Genesis 18: 2, 16; Ezekiel 9:2). They have often been viewed as elemental spirits and were often linked to natural phenomena such as fire, wind and clouds (1 Enoch 60:11-21). Angels were given particular names (1 Enoch 9:1). God created the angels following the creation of Earth to glorify Him (Genesis 2). Angels are a factual existing transcendent spiritual realism. God's essence is Unapproachable even when it comes to the Archangels (St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theologicus II*). The angels are spiritual beings and are thus gifted with free-will, having the "...authority and the freedom either to remain and to progress in goodness and virtue, or to turn to evil (St John of Damascus, *Exposition. About angels*). The



"home" of angels is in heaven, "in the third heaven where the archangels stand before the throne of God, surrounded by a countless heavenly army" (Isaiah 6; Revelation 4:5).

In Genesis, they are referred to as spiritual beings created by God who are both bodiless and invisible. Their early role was to "...keep the way of the Tree of Life" and they were Cherubs with "...the fiery sword that turns about" (Genesis, 3:25). Saint Augustine explains that once Angels were created, they were crafted as created Light, which is engrossed in the *Logos*, the light who creates all, and they watch Him diligently, seeing themselves in Him and also in one another (St Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteriam*). The angels "...superintend the events of your life and protect the interest of Lord God, always working to promote his plans to bring about His highest will for you" (Graham, 1976). Angels possess physical features and have heads, faces, eyes, hair, eyes, mouths hands and feet. They also have emotions, appetites, passions, desires, language, intelligence, willpower, knowledge and wisdom (see Babylonian Talmud; Midrash; Jeffrey, 1996). They are also described as being holy (Matthew 25:31).

They are also called watchers, military hosts, Sons of the Mighty, and Sons of God in various verses of scripture for example in Matthew. 22: 30; Luke 20: 36; I Peter 3: 22; Revelation. 4:8; 22:8-9; Hebrews 1: 16 and Colossians 2:18). John informs us that "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). Paul advises that, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (referring to angels) all things have been created by Him and for Him" (Colossians 1: 16). God asks of Job, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation ... and all the angels (sons of God) shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4,7). This suggests that angels existed before the creation of earth and all of the quantifiable universe including humans. In Exodus 20:11, Moses tells us that Creation took place inside six days. Consequently, angels were created within the first six days. Genesis 1:1-5 stresses that on the first day of Creation, God created the heavens and the earth. The Holy Fathers believe that only God is Infinitely Bodiless, while all the Angels have thin, airy and fiery bodies (Psalm 104/105:4).

St. Dionysios the Areopagite informs that angels were fashioned as humans in the "image and likeness" of God. In the "image" since they have an intellect that generates thoughts and in the "likeness" because they are focused and engrossed toward God (St. Ignatius Brianchaninov). Angels as logical creatures are accountable, see for example in the gospels (Matthew 12:36-37; 5:21-22; 10:15; 11:20-24; 12:18, 31-32; 23:33; 25:31-46; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 10:14-15; John 3:18; 5:22, 24-30; 8:15-16; 12:31, 48; 16:8,11). St. Basil the Great established that "...they do not change..." in their bodies and do not age. This is because there is no "...child or youth or elder amongst the Angels." Rather "...they remain in the condition..." in which "...from the beginning they were created..." as "...their composition..." remains "... whole and unchangeable" (St Basil the Great, *To Psalm 45*). Given their spirit essence, angels are invisible to humans but they assume a human form as they deliver messages from God. In Numbers 22: 22-27, we read that they are at times perceptible to animals such as was the case with Balaam's donkey.

St. John of Damascus declares that angels are creatures restricted in time and also space: "We speak about the angels as bodiless and immaterial compared to us, but in fact everything is heavy and material compared to God, to Whom nobody can be compared, because only the Divine is non-material and bodiless... **God created the angels according to His own image** and He created them weightless and with heat...The angel is always in motion, he has free will, gifted with an immortal nature. This nature is intellectual, thus he has a free changing will" (St John of Damascus, *Homily on angels and demons*).



In Psalms 91:11-13, we are told that angels function under God's command, and neither alone nor apart from Him. God instructs angels to guard humans from physical danger and demonic forces (c.f. Luke 10:18-19; Revelation 12). Angels are much stronger and even far more astute than humans but their power is limited by God (Psalm 103:20; 2 Peter 2:11). Angels are masculine looking but sexless and do not marry (Matthew 22:30). In each of their manifestations as humans in the Bible they appear as men only. They are never mentioned as being female or a child. The cherubim were however often depicted as a *putto* (Italian) which a figure in a work of art depicted as a chubby male child, typically naked and occasionally winged, and cherubs assumed this well-known form in art in the Mediaeval period (Dempsey, 2001). Angels can communicate in human language and affect human life as part of their fundamental role. Many people have entertained angels as supernatural beings without knowing that they have done so (Hebrews 13:2). While Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us that angels are intellectual creatures and are pure spirit, they are entirely incorporeal and in no way material, and thus have no bodies of any kind. (Ia 50, 2) , we find that St Augustine (1887) says that angels manifested to Abraham under assumed bodies. Origen however argues in *Peri Archon i*: "It is God's attribute alone—that is, it belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as a property of nature, that He is understood to exist without any material substance and without any companionship of corporeal addition". Angels received holiness right from their very creation out of nothingness, they are still able to move towards evil and need to strive to progress and become perfect in holiness all the time (St Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 38).

Aquinas suggests why there are angelic appearances and in Ia 51, 2 ad 1 (St. Thomas Aquinas, 1920) he says it is to "give evidence of that intellectual companionship which men expect to have with them in the life to come," and also as "...as a figurative indication that the Word of God would take a human body". He also says angels appear so that spiritual properties and works may be demonstrated more appropriately than by humans. Angels come to appraise humanity of divine realisms, and in this way they can lead people to God as stated in Ia 51, 3 ad 1 & 2 and can thus alter form (St. Thomas Aquinas, 1920). Creatures have a possibility to adapt to the capacity of the various orders of nature to participate in the divine likeness and thus gain a better knowledge of God (Collins, 1947).

Saint John Chrysostom clarified on the worth of angels' wings: "They manifest a nature's sublimity. That is why Gabriel is represented with wings. Not that angels have wings, but that you may know that they leave the heights and the most elevated dwelling to approach human nature. Accordingly, the wings attributed to these powers have no other meaning than to indicate the sublimity of their nature" (*Proverbio*, 2007). Nonetheless, the prophet Daniel describes angels as having wings (Daniel 9:21).

In Psalm 91 we find that angels can cover us with their feathers and give us sanctuary under their wings while their faithfulness will be our "shield and rampart". They possess immense power and look awesome (Matthew 28: 1-3) and this makes them dreaded to the extent that humans may even adore them. In Psalm 35:4-7 it asserts that angels drive away evil. However, in Colossians 2:18 and also in Revelation 22:9 we are admonished to not worship them. Angels and humans are the solitary moral and highly intelligent beings created. Having said that, angels were created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-27; 9: 6).

Unlike God, they are not omnipotent, omniscient or even omnipresent (see for example Daniel 10; 132 Samuel 14: 20; Romans 8:38; 2 Thessalonians). Angels are used to proclaim a gospel (Galatians 1:8) and in some cases the law is ordained through them (Galatians 3:19). People generally respond positively to angelic visitation (Galatians 4:17). Angels are cogent and intelligent, and gifted with free-will, and can be inconsistent because all that is created is changeable, and



only the un-created is unchangeable. They thus have the ability to advance in goodness or seek an evil path and cannot repent (St. John of Damascus, Book II). They also have the power of illumination and do need to speak or hear but can still communicate with each other their own thoughts and counsels (c.f. Revelation 5:11; Hebrews 12:22; Deuteronomy 33:2.). Jesus as the Creator, referred to angels' numerous times. Paul advises that, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (referring to angels) all things have been created by Him and for Him" (Colossians 1: 16). A key function of angels is to protect the gates of the New Jerusalem and keep out all unholy elements. This is similar to what they do on earth. In Psalm 34:7, we read that the "Angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them". We also have numerous other examples such as, for example, when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were safeguarded by an angel when they were cast into a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:21). Angels are both intellectual and logical creatures (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 38*). Christ informs that that angels have advanced knowledge when compared humans and they are positioned between God and man even if their knowledge is constrained (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7). They will be participants in the final Battle of Armageddon as stated in Revelation. Angels often ride heavenly horses (Zechariah 1: 7-11). Notwithstanding centuries of theological conjecture about angels on aspects such as how many there may be, to their responsibilities etc, no one knows for sure if they exist outside of stories and legends. Yet, "A 2007 Baylor Religion Survey found that 57 percent of Catholics, 81 percent of black Protestants, 66 percent of Evangelical Protestants, and 10 percent of Jews reported having a personal experience with a guardian angel. And 20 percent of those who identified themselves as having no religion also claimed having encountered an angel" (Radford, 2018). Paul teaches that when devotees take part in adoration activities, they are in the presence of angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

Orders of Angels

There are three decorations (triads) and nine ranks of celestial beings each have distinct capabilities and tasks. A hierarchy exists among the bodiless powers or the Hosts (*Sabaoth* means literally "armies" or "choirs" or "ranks"). St. Dionysius teaches us "How many ranks there are of heavenly beings, what their nature is and in what manner the mystery of holy authority is ordered among them, only God can know in detail. [...] All that we can say about this is what God has revealed to us through them themselves, because they know themselves" (St. Dionysius [1935] *On the Celestial Hierarchies*). St. Augustine states a similar viewpoint: "That there exist thrones, principalities; dominions and powers in the heavenly mansions, I believe most firmly, and I hold it as an undoubted fact that there are distinctions between them, but what exactly they are like and what exactly are the distinctions between them, I do not know" (St. Augustine, *Concerning Faith of Things*).

St. Gregory the Great in Homily 34, (In Evang.) lucidly clarifies the view of the Church on the issue of ranks and orders of angels:

We know on the authority of Scripture that there are nine orders of angels, viz., Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Throne, Cherubim and Seraphim. That there are Angels and Archangels nearly every page of the Bible tells us, and the books of the Prophets talk of Cherubim and Seraphim. St. Paul, too, writing to the Ephesians enumerates four orders when he says: 'above all Principality, and Power, and Virtue, and Domination'; and again, writing to the Colossians he says: 'whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers'. If we now join these two lists together we have five Orders,



and adding Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, we find nine Orders of Angels.

Angels struggle against spiritual evil and are intermediaries between God and the world. They bring the supremacy and presence of God and are messengers of the *Logos* for the salvation of the world. St. Ambrose (Dudden, 1935) and also St. Jerome (Herbermann, 1913), both suggested descriptions of the angelic order in the 4th Century CE. Pseudo-Dionysius was by far the most influential of these writers (Louth, 1989). In 787 CE, at the second Council of Nicaea an official 'Dogma of Archangels' was decreed (Lamberz, 2016). That the angels were created was laid down by Roman Catholics in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 CE (Pope, 1907). The treatise *De Coelesti Hierarchia* of Dionysius the Areopagite, discusses at great length of the hierarchies and orders of the angels. Its canon concerning the 'choirs of angels' has been received in the Church with unanimity.

Pseudo-Dionysius was one of numerous who have proposed a vertical hierarchical structure of angels. In reading the Holy Fathers concerning the number of orders of the angels and their divisions, there is clearly no agreement as such (inter alia St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *To Leviticus*). The Holy Bible offers us some idea on the organization of angels. They seem to be organized into several ranks, orders and positions. In the hierarchical arrangement of angels, each rank operates as an envoy for the one immediately above it. The subordinate ranks are elevated and yet maintain their positions by the communication that they have received. There is mention of an "assembly" and "council" of the angels (Psalm 89:5, 7), and of the manner in which they are organized for conflict situations (Revelation 12:7).

The Orthodox Church explains in its dogma that there are nine "choirs" or groups of angels comprising Angels, Archangels, Powers, Authorities, Principalities, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim (see *inter alia* Genesis 3:24; Isaiah 6:2; Colossians 1:16; 1; 1 Peter 3:22). St Paul mentioned "...Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers..." and "Might," as well as "Angels" and "Archangels" (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21; Romans 8:38; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The scriptures indicate that there are very many angels. In the Book of Revelation we find: "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many Angels around the Throne, the living creatures, and the Elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11; 9:16; 19:1, 20). Christ referred to massive amounts Angels when He gave Himself up to the Jews in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:53). Angels also have administrative classifications which indicate some organization and ranking among them (Ephesians 3:10; 6:12). For example, Michael is entitled the 'Archangel' or 'chief' angel along with Raphael, Gabriel and Ariel (Jude 9). However, in Daniel 10:13 he is termed as being one of the foremost princes. Saint Dionysius the Aeropagite and Saint John of Damascus, divide the angels into nine distinct 'Orders' and three 'Decorations' (St. Dionysius, *About divine names*; St. John of Damascus, *Exposition About angels*).

In Genesis 3:25 it refers to "...Cherubim and the fiery sword that turns about..." which God positioned "...against the Garden of Delight ... to keep the Way of the Tree of Life...". There is also reference to six-winged Seraphim who stand "...round about..." God's glory and "...with two wings covered their faces, and with two [wings] covered their feet, and with two flew..." as they glorified the one who sits on the "...high and exalted Throne" (Isaiah 6:1-3).

In the first decoration of Angels we find the orders of Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones who stand round about God and have a very intimate communion with Him. In the second decoration we find a further three orders comprising of Dominions, Authorities and Powers. Finally, in the third decoration we encounter the Principalities, Archangels and Angels. These orders are however



debatable and there is no settlement amongst the Holy Fathers regarding the number of decorations and their orders (See for example St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* and St. Basil the Great, *Homily*, XV).

St. Gregory the Dialogist elucidates:

We accept the existence of nine ranks of angels, because from the evidence of the Word of God we know about angels, archangels, powers, authorities, principalities, dominions, thrones, cherubim and seraphim. The existence of angels and archangels is witnessed throughout Holy Scripture; it is principally the books of the Prophets which mention Cherubim and Seraphim. The names of yet another four ranks are listed by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he writes: 'Far above all principality; and power, and might, and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come' (Ephesians 1:21); and also in his Epistle to the Colossians: 'For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him' (Colossians 1:16). Thus, when to those four, of whom he speaks to the Ephesians—that is to the Principalities, Authorities, Powers and Dominions—we add the Thrones, mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians, that adds up to five ranks of angels; and when to them we add the Angels, Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, we can see that there are nine ranks of angels.

From lowest to highest order then are the Angels, Archangels, Powers, Authorities, Principalities, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubim, and at the top of the pyramid we find the Seraphim based on the interpretation of a translation by St Gregory. Other translators did not understand Paul to refer to orders of angels in Ephesians and Colossians but to worldly powers.

Seraphim: They are the highest rank in Christian angelology and they appear in the 2nd Century BCE Book of Enoch (xx. 7), where they are mentioned, in combination with next order of cherubim, as being heavenly creatures standing adjacent to the throne of God. These angels understand God with the greatest clarity and they are "on fire" for Him (Seraphim means 'the burning one's'). The cleanse people by their heat and their brightness enlightens others. In Isaiah 6: 1-7 we read:

6 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.² Above it stood the Seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.⁵ Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. ⁶ Then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.



Isaiah explains “And the seraphim stood around Him, each having six wings” (Isaiah 6:2). The seraphim are fire-like, “Who maketh his angels’ spirits; his ministers a flaming fire” (Psalms 103:4).

Cherubim: These angels contemplate God mainly in his providence and His wise plans for His creatures. Great understanding and wisdom pervade their being, and it is they who enlighten our spiritual eyes in seeking God and knowledge of God. They protected the entrance of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). We find mention of them in Psalms 80 and 99, and in Ezekiel 10. In the Book of Ezekiel, and in some Orthodox iconography, cherubs are depicted as having two pairs of wings, and four faces: that of a lion (representative of all wild animals), an ox (domestic animals), a human (humanity), and an eagle (birds) (Wood, 2008). The cherubim are categorized by their deep knowledge (Keck, 1998). According to Exodus 25: 10-22, the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments was adorned with two Cherubic statues on its golden lid and God provided detailed instructions for its construction. In Western art, cherubim became associated with the Graeco-Roman god Cupid/Eros, and they are often depicted as slight, plump, winged boys (Wood, 2008).

Thrones: The Thrones symbolize God’s power and judicial power and inspire humans to serve and bond his soul with the essence of service. The Thrones are called God-bearing not by their essence, but by their service, and it is believed that God providentially and incomprehensibly rests upon them. God also demonstrates His magnificence and justice through them. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite includes the thrones as the third highest of nine order levels angels (Bunson, 1996). They are talked about by Paul in Colossians 1:16. They are characterized by harmony and obedience and God rests upon them. Thrones are often depicted as great wheels enclosing many eyes, and they reside in the area of the heavens where material form begins to take shape. They chant hymns to God and are eternally in his presence (Bunson, 1996). They can also hand out divine justice and preserve celestial harmony (Gulley, 1996). The thrones are termed “God-bearing” but not according to essence and rather according to grace, “...given for their service, which is mystically and incomprehensibly to bear God in themselves. Residing on them in an incomprehensible manner, God makes His righteous judgement, according to the word of David: “Thou hast sat upon a throne, O Thou that judgest righteousness.” (Psalms 9:4). Therefore, through them the justice of God is pre-eminently demonstrated; they attend to His justice, ‘...glorifying it, and pour out the power of justice onto the thrones of earthly judges, helping kings and masters to bring forth right judgement” (Menaia of St Dimitry of Rostov, 1968).

Powers: They are co-equal with the Dominions and Virtues and signify a “regulated but unconfined order of intellectual power (Mother Alexandra, 2019). They fight all evil and protect us against demonic forces and temptation. It is believed that the powers are the angels that strengthen and stand by ascetics in their spiritual struggles and varied challenges although this cannot be proved. They are thus protecting them and help to wrestle with the passions and vices, and also with the casting out of evil thoughts and the many slanders of the evil enemy. We find mention of them in the Epistle to the Ephesians 1:21, where it seems they have an office with legal jurisdiction that is “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come...” and also in Romans 8:38 “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come...”. The Apostle Peter, said that when Christ ascended into the heavens, He was worshipped by angels, authorities, and powers.

Dominions / Authorities: The dominions dominate over the rest of the angels that trail them. They have abandoned submissive fear, and joyfully willingly serve God unceasingly. They give power for judicious governing and astute management to earthly authorities as established by God (St Dionysius, *About divine names*). Instruct on how to control the senses and mollify



depraved desires, passions and temptations (see Ephesians 1:21). Some of the Church Fathers have confidence in notion that the guardian angel of Apostle Peter, who lead him out of prison emanated from the rank of the Dominions.

Principalities: The Principalities are the angels that guide and defend nations and also groups of peoples, and institutions such as the Church. They lead groups of angels and trust them with accomplishing the divine ministry they were created to carry out. The Principalities apparently confer blessings to the material world and they are the mentors and custodians of the earth (see St. Gregory the Dialogist). They thus teach people in authority according to their calling and they raise worthy people to various honorable offices and direct them to care for others.

Virtues: The virtues possess divine strength and with godlike energy accomplish the will of the Lord. They are empowered to perform miracles and send down the grace of miracle-working to God's people, who are worthy of such grace. The virtues bear the infirmities of the weak and fortify people to face their physical and other challenges as they serve the Lord according to Orthodoxy.

Archangels: The Archangels are bearers of the Divine Seal which marks the soul with the living Word of God (Mother Alexandra, 2019). They are termed the great proclaimers of good news and they were recorded in ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Their service according to St. Dionysius the Areopagite consists of revealing prophecies, knowledge, and understanding of God's will which they have received from superior orders of angels. St. Gregory the Dialogist tells us that it is they who strengthen people in the faith, by illuminating them in knowledge of the holy Gospel and by revealing the mysteries of fervent faith. We read of them in inter alia 1Thessalonians 4 and the Epistle of Jude v. 9.

Ordinary angels

All the celestial creatures are the spiritual *hypostasis* or the objective or very spiritual reality of all of ordered creation. "There is one Sovereign and Providence of all" and God does not share His sovereignty with any and so the guardian angels are given to us so that we might: "...know through him the One Principle of all things..." (Dionysios, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*).

Holy Scripture refers to some as angels and others archangels (I Thessalonians 4:16; Jude v. 9). The Angels are the lowermost of all the orders in the hierarchy and the closest to humans. They declare the lesser mysteries and purposes of God. They teach people to live a virtuous life and to be righteous before God. They guard all who believe and have been primarily sent into the world as guardian angels. Christ Himself assures us of their being when he says: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones (children); for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

St. John Chrysostom states: "There are in truth other powers, whose names even are unknown to us. Not only angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, authorities and powers inhabit the heavens, but there are innumerable other kinds and an unimaginable multitude of classes, which no words can be adequate to express. But what evidence is there that there are more powers than those whose names are known to us? The Apostle Paul, when he mentions one of the series of ranks we know, also reminds of the other which we do not, when he writes of Christ: 'He ... set Him at His own right hand, in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come' (Ephesians 1:20-21). From this we see that there are certain names which will be known then, but are now unknown. Hence the reference to a "name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." There are thus angelic orders and ranks that we do not know anything about at the present time. The ordinary angels are there to guard each of us who believe.



There are however seven angels who have the special purpose to "stand before God's throne" (Tobit 12:15; Revelation 8:2-5). In Orthodoxy, based on Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition it is believed there are seven supreme archangels. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister" (Hebrews 1:14). These include Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Salaphiel, Jegudiel, and Barachiel (Elwell, 1997). Michael and Gabriel are described as the superlative leaders of the heavenly host of angels and Archangel Michael is particularly considered to be the guardian of the Orthodox Christian faith and he is a combatant against heresies. His name means "Who is like unto God". Archangel Michael is the angel who will lead the heavenly host when Christ returns at the Second Coming, "When the Son of man shall in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him" (As Jesus said in the Gospel – Matthew 25:31). Archangel Gabriel is considered to be the messenger of God and his name means "God is my strength." He is in charge of the mysteries of God while Archangel Raphael is connected to physical and spiritual healing. His name means "It is God who heals" (Elwell, 1997).

The Fallen Angels

The Holy Scriptures and also Apostolic Tradition attest to the notion that there are both good and bad angels. In the Book of Genesis there is an evil 'serpent' referred to. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, calls it the "...great dragon, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9; 20:2). All the Early Church Fathers, believe that angels were created at the beginning. Some who were as good Angels, fell from their grace due to their pride and the desire to be greater than God. The book of Isaiah records: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14). Fallen angels became acknowledged as angels who were led by Satan in a rebellion against God and they were associated with demons.

In the late Second Temple period, demons were not regarded as the fallen angels but rather as enduring souls of their atrocious progeny. The fallen angels had sexual intercourse with human women, giving existence to biblical giants. Between 530 BCE and 70 CE in the Book of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees and the Qumran Book of Giants there are references to heavenly beings termed "Watchers". The term however originated in Daniel 4. In 1 Enoch 7.2, we are told that the Watchers become "enamoured" with women. In order to cleanse the world of them God sent the Great Flood and their bodies were destroyed but their spirits subsisted and they roam the earth as demons. Others fell from Grace because they coveted humans who were made in the "image and likeness" of God, and who they later led to the Fall which alienated humanity from God. In early Christianity, the interaction between the 'Watchers' as they were termed, and human women was often seen as the first fall of the angels (Boyd, 1997). Most of the early Church Fathers accepted the association of the angelic lineage myth to the "sons of God" passage as found in Genesis 6:1–4 (Reed, 2005). To early Christian writers, the image of the fallen morning star or angel applied to Lucifer/Satan (Schwartz, 2004; Bamberger, 2006).

Fallen angels are also free-willed bodiless, immortal and eternal beings, like the good angels. They estranged themselves from God as they plotted against Him and became the beginning as well as the source of evil. Their leader Lucifer/Satan/the Devil, remain in spiritual darkness and are, according to Orthodox belief, completely unable to know or understand divine truths and actions and are blind to the will of the Creator and His desire for human atonement and salvation for humankind. Jesus Christ teaches us that the devil "...was a murderer from the beginning, and



does not stand in the Truth ... for he is a liar and the father of it.” (John 8:44). Jesus Christ often spoke to His disciples about the evil one, the tempter, the Devil, Satan or Beelzebub (see Matthew. 4:3-11; 12:24-27; 16:23. Mark 3:23; 4:15. Luke 4:2-13; 10:18; 22:3, 31). Satan is called the enemy who spreads “...tares...” in the world (Matthew 13:25).

According to Orthodox belief, Satan was bent as a powerful archangel, and was one of the most faultless and glowing (Isaiah 14:12). He was thus named Lucifer, “the light-bearer”. But when he selected to act contrary to the will of God, he fell from grace and left his abode in heaven. St. Jude articulates: “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 6). Lucifer focused all his attention on his own excellence, removing himself from the truth which linked him to his Creator, and was the haughtiest and most narcissistic being. Consequently, he rebelled against God and took with him many spirits who accepted his authority and he became the prince of darkness (2 Peter 2:4). Peter advises that the final judgment of fallen angels is still to come because: “Those angels who kept not their first place, but deserted their own habitation, He hath kept in everlasting bodes under darkness until the judgment of the great day” (Jude 1:6).

Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (1920) tells us:

If they are called evil, it is not in respect of their being, since they own their origin to the Good and were the recipients of a good being, but rather because being is lacking to them by virtue of the inability, as Scripture puts it, 'to keep their first place.' For I ask you, in what way are the demons evil except in the fact that they have put an end to the habit and the activity of divine good things? Their evil consists in the lack of angelic virtues...If they are declared evil, the reason lies in them, their move away from what befits them...What has happened to them is that they have fallen away from the complete goodness granted to them....The are called evil because of the deprivation, the abandonment, the rejection of the virtues which are appropriate to them. (St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*).

Thus, the Archangel Michael took command of the faithful angels and he formed an army of angels to fight those that had fallen into the abyss. Christ tells us, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

Saint John of Damascus informs that:

Lucifer was not made wicked in nature but was good, and made for good ends, and received from his Creator no trace whatever of evil in himself. But he did not sustain the brightness and the honor which the Creator had bestowed on him. Of his free choice, he was changed from what was in harmony to what was at variance with his nature, and became roused against God; thus, he was the first to depart from good and become evil. For evil is nothing else that absence of goodness, just as darkness also is the absence of light. For goodness is the light of the mind, and, similarly, evil is the darkness of the mind....now along with him an innumerable host of angels, subject to him, were torn away, followed him, and shared in his fall. therefore, being of the same nature as the angels, they became wicked, turning away at their own free



choice from good to evil. (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*).

In the book of Revelation we find: "There occurred a war in the heavens. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought against them. However, they did not prevail, and there was no room for them in heaven. The great dragon was cast down, that ancient snake, known as devil and satan...and his angels were also cast down with him" (Revelation 12:7-9). Fallen angels reside in "Hell" and are bound in "chains of darkness". Nevertheless, until the appointed Day of Judgment they have some freedom which they use to attack humans (1 John 3:12; 2 Corinthians 2:11). This is why we are called to be attentive, clear-headed and cautious, regarding Satan's attacks and focus on the Lord our God (1 John 3:8. 1 John 3:10; 1 John 4:4; 5:18). After all, that is why the Lord was Incarnated and died for us (1 John 3:8).

John of Damascus elucidates:

Of the future, both the angels of God and the demons are alike ignorant; yet they make predictions. God reveals the future to angels and commands them to prophesy, and so what they say comes to pass. But the demons also make predictions, sometimes because they see what is happening at a distance, and sometimes merely making guesses. Hence much of what they say is false, and they should not be believed, even although they do often, in the way we have said, tell what is true; besides, they know the Scriptures...All wickedness, then, and all impure passions are the work of their mind. But while the liberty to attack man has been granted to them, they have not the strength to overmaster anyone; for we have it in our power to receive or not to receive the attack. Thus, there has been prepared for the devil and his demons, and those who follow him, fire unquenchable and everlasting punishment...Not further than what in the case of man is death, is a fall in the case of angels. For after the fall there is no possibility of repentance for them, just as after death there is for men no repentance. (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*).

The battle between good and evil started before the creation of the world will continue until the day of the Final Day of Judgment and our guardian angels are there to assist us.

Biblical manifestations of Angels

Angels are spoken of at many places in the Old and New Testaments as messengers to mankind and as intermediaries between God and humans. For example, one of the cherubim armed with a flaming sword guarded the gates of the Garden of Eden after the Fall (Genesis 3:24). Abraham tells Nahor in Genesis 24:7, 40, that the Lord will direct His angel to him and help to prosper his way (Genesis 24: 7, 40). Two angels spoken of in Genesis 19:1 warn Lot to leave Sodom and Gomorrah before God crushed it. Jacob saw angels both in a dream the vision. In the dream, angels were depicted as ascending and descending a ladder which stretched from earth to heaven while God watches on. In his vision, Jacob saw a host of the angels of God (Genesis 28:10–19). Jacob's Ladder was also used as an analogy for the spiritual ascetic of life as expounded by John Climacus in his *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Herbermann, 1913a). An angel who found Hagar in the wilderness (Genesis 16), and it was an angel that proclaimed to Gideon



that he was to save his people. 1 Kings 19 we read that Elijah was extremely afraid and running for his life in, and an angel appeared to him and delivered food and water for his passage. It was also an angel that portended the birth of Samson (Judges 13). An angel informs Hagar to return to her mistress and apprise her of her pregnancy with a son who was to be named Ishmael (Genesis 16:7). In Judges 6:11 Gideon is told by an angel that he is to save Israel from the aggressive Midianites.

In Daniel's vision he pronounces that he saw "thousands of thousands serving the One on the throne, and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before Him" (Daniel 7:10). Daniel had a visitation from an angel that restores his strength when he was in a difficult spiritual place (Daniel 10). Isaiah witnessed the Seraphim surrounding the throne of God (Isaiah. 6:1-7) and Ezekiel saw Cherubim in his vision of the Temple of God (Ezekiel. 10:1-22). In Isaiah 6:1-7, the prophet has a vision in which there are Seraphim each with six wings, calling to one another and saying "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." Here we find angels singing praises to God and then touching Isaiah's lips with a burning coal to cleanse and prepare him to communicate with the people (Isaiah 6). There are numerous other references to angels in the Old Testament in books such as Psalms, Job, and in the Prophets.

In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation mentions angels many times. From the reference to angels in seven churches (Revelation 1-3) to the angels blaring the seven trumpets (Revelation 8), angels are everywhere. In Matthew 1:20-21 we read of the angelic visitation to Joseph in which he was informed that he should take Mary as his wife because her conception of child was of the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:26 informs us that the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary the birth of the Messiah. Angels appeared to the shepherds, accompanied by the radiance of the glory of God, thus accentuating the divine happening of the birth of Our Lord in His human nature and they also pronounce His birth (Luke 2:9-15) and His incarnation (Matthew 1:20,24). Christ teaches that angels repeatedly enjoy the vision of God in heaven and that all children have angels allotted to them (Matthew 18:10). Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert and was debilitated by his hunger, and endured the derision of Satan as he attempted to make Christ sin. Satan ordered Jesus to turn stones into bread so that He could eat (Matthew 4:3). When Christ was tempted the angels ministered to Him in the desert. Jesus resisted three of the devil's temptations, including the coaxing to meet his physical needs. After this trying episode, the angels appear and attend to Jesus (Matthew 4:11). In Matthew 4:11 it says, "Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him". They also reinforced Him in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). In Matthew 26:53 on His arrest, Jesus says "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels". It is also angels who were the first witnesses of His Glorious Resurrection (Matthew 28:2-7).

In Matthew 22:30 Jesus imparts to us that when we die we become like angels and thus, spiritual beings. In Acts 5:19, Angels loosed the bonds of Peter and the other Apostles and of Peter alone in Acts 12:7-15. An angel also appeared to Cornelius the Centurion, instructing him to send for Peter who would teach him concerning the word of God (Acts 10:3-7). An angel announced to Paul that he was to appear before Caesar (Acts 27:23-24). Jesus presages that angels will accompany Him at His Second Coming (Matthew 16:27). An angel also appeared to Peter and released him and others from their chains (Acts 5:19; 12:7-15).

Links with African Traditional Cosmology (ATC)

African traditional cosmology shares with Christianity a belief in the spiritual which is shared universally with others. For most if not all of Africa the realm of the spiritual constitutes the bedrock of life. Thus human courses, action, hope and the individual will itself is premised upon spiritual



beings and entities to provide meaning and its vital force. However, unlike the Christian concept of the spiritual premised on the existence of angels who are and were created by God prior to the creation of the physical world, Africans largely have an idea of spiritual beings and entities in the form of ancestors. However, the spiritual realm perceived by Africans consists of more than the spirits of ancestors. There are also powers, demons, souls of the unborn and the dead. Even gods reside in the spiritual realm, Ancestors are thought of to be spiritual entities who once inhabited the realm of the living in a like manner as the rest of mortal humanity but who have now passed on, the latter being the direct descendants of the former (Turaki, 2000). Furthermore, traditional African cosmology holds that communication with the divine ought to be through the family ancestors; and in more ways than one, it is they who provide the route and communication with the Almighty. In some quarters this is usually regarded or identified with ancestral worship, i.e. the worship of ancestors as the ultimate form of devotion and also rituals. However, the correct view and order is that of the ancestors as providing a link between the living with God. It is this that has given rise to the expression 'the dead are never really dead', that they remain with us albeit in spiritual form. Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata put the matter thus:

From an African perspective death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors' realm dead (2014: 232).

So whereas in the Christian worldview, you find a top-down link between God via the angels, African spirituality assumes a bottom-up ontology through the ancestors. This creates a need for the individual person to align himself/herself in terms of this relational ontology.

The meaning of life hinges so much on the spiritual, such that the meaning of existence itself, can be explained in terms of this metaphysic. Okeke et al (2017: 3) explain that "The ancestors, the Igbo believe, wield tremendous powers of blessings and power of curse." Thus when, for example one meets with misfortune, this is usually ascribed to a misrelating position between oneself, one's ancestors and God. Almost every aspect of life can be explained in terms of the link with the spiritual (Kudadjie, 1995; Turaki, 1999). Similarly, fortune means one has the favour of the ancestors who, functioning like the Christian angels, bestow riches and comfort upon the individual.

Writing within the context of the Igbo experience in Nigeria, Okeke et al (2017: 4) take the matter even further arguing that traditional Igbo ontology eschew the eschatological idea of final Judgement by God. They instead posit an idea of life as a journey and as cyclical, meaning after death one reincarnates in a rather cyclical manner. However, this is reserved for those who have lived a virtuous and good life, or put differently those who have achieved African personhood.

Important to note that just as it is with Christian angelology, there is here a distinction between good and bad ancestors (Afeke & Venter, 2004). A good ancestor may be likened to any of God's angels who assists God with his mission on the planet. If one were to invoke the doctrine of destiny, it may be said that good angels (as well as good ancestors) assist God in fulfilling one's destiny by bringing light and protection upon the individual. A bad ancestor on the other hand, may be due to or ascribed to unresolved antagonism, witchcraft etc. for, the Bible too, speaks of fallen angels who rejoice in causing misfortune and suffering. As we have read earlier, in Holy Scripture, angels are directed to serve God's grander purposes. This includes announcing great events to people for example such as Daniel 3:28 and Luke 1:19. Humans do not appeal to angels directly and instead, the Creator may send them to help believers they request His help as per Matthew 26:53 and also Hebrews 1:14. By contrast then, ATR lacks this all-embracing objective of help and lead humans to salvation. The ancestral spirits serve much more ordinary purposes.



Biblical angels diverge, and offer hope in the heart of travail and attend to humans and worship the Creator into eternity.

Witchcraft nonetheless assumes an important role in the African spiritual milieu. It can be regarded as the deliberate manipulation of (evil) spirits and inflicting demons upon another fellow human. Thus, its significance rests insofar as the perpetrator seeks to assume the role of God in deciding both the fate and destiny on individuals. Thus, the witch or practitioner of witchcraft *ipso facto* disturbs the normative relational ontology by way of usurpation through trickery, treachery and mischief. Because of this very fact, this act which in essence is the work of the devil, who is the personification of evil as it is comprehended in numerous cultures and religious traditions, takes place. The devil is perceived to be the objectification of an antagonistic and disparaging entity and is not taken lightly in the African spiritual universe (Parrinder, 1975). As a result, one often finds that those who are seen or are even suspect of practicing witchcraft are often met with harsh punishment by some members of the community or death in most cases by burning the victim (Levack, 1995).

Conclusion

If one believes in and acknowledge a spiritual world then one invariably steps beyond the limits of the corporeal world. Faith and reason both point to a spiritual dimension inhabited by angels. God constantly reveals his spiritual creatures to humanity through divine Revelation and Christian traditions. In the Orthodox Church it is commonly understood that the creation of the Cosmos includes the angels. This view commences with a confidence in an invisible and omnipotent Creator who willed the presence of angels for the purpose of worshiping, serving, and glorifying Him.

Angels are an important detail of the Holy Scriptures, tradition and the teachings of the early Church Fathers. Angels are spirits that act and move, have intellect and will, but should not be understood as supernatural because only God is “supernatural” (above nature) since He alone is not created. “Yes in Him, all created things took their being, heavenly and earthly, visible and invisible...” (Colossians 1:16). The sole purpose of the angels is to serve God as instruments of His will. “For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psalm 90:11). The foremost work of angels is however to praise God, but they are also tasked to guard humans and the Cosmos. We are capable of accessing fundamental realities or even underlying basic realities or “noumena” in the quest for truth. Angels are creations of God, and act in direct compliance to the will of God. It is only the Holy Spirit grows the believer spiritually (Macy, 2011) although angels may, as it were, ‘encourage us’ in our faith. Angels are real and this is something that individuals can discern for themselves. They are God's messengers. There is a cosmic spiritual realm that envelopes us daily, even though we cannot perceive this (Colossians 1:16). Angels as messengers of God, have been created to serve God and humans as His creatures - “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). In their holy state, as unfallen beings they are never spoken of as created in the image of God, and are also termed “sons of God” because they have a disposition like God. We are cautioned in Hebrews 13:2 “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

Paul says “We are made spectacles to the Angels...” (1 Corinthians 4:9), but “We shall judge the Angels” (1 Corinthians 6:3). Angels are the perfect spirits and far superior to man in their mental and spiritual powers but still have limits. For example, they are incapable of knowing all human thoughts (1 Kings 8:39), and they descend from heaven to earth or ascending from earth to heaven, which shows us that they cannot be on earth and in heaven simultaneously. Nonetheless,



angels are incorporeal and transcend all earthly authorities, as Peter tells us (2 Peter 2:11). They are immortal (Luke 20:36) but this is not autonomous and categorical but rather dependent on the will and clemency meted out by the Creator. Any miracle they perform is at the behest of God (Psalms 71:19). Angels teach us how to worship. In Revelation 5:11–12, John sees around God's throne a countless angelic army, "numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" Irrespective, they do not know the depths of the quintessence of the Creator or the future (Mark 13:32). Only the Spirit of God knows this (1 Corinthians 2:11). They are clueless when it comes to the issue of restoration and "desire to look into" it (1 Peter 1:12) but are unable to do so. St. Origen asserts that in the illumination stage, the human soul enters the world of angels so as to attain a life of unification with the Creator (Origen, *Para Celsus*).

It is only the Creator who has authority over angels and we are not ever told to give them an instruction or to order them to do something (Psalm 91:11). We need to remember that Satan also masquerades as an angel of light. We thus need the *Paraclete* (Holy Spirit) to guide us (2 Corinthians 11:14). We do not need to fear angels. Though this may be our normal response if we met one face to face, the Bible reminds us that we do not need to fear (Luke 2:10). God's great antagonist, Satan is out there to deceive humanity and he is persistently on the prowl like a roaring lion in search of those he may devour by his reprehensible actions (1 Peter 5:8). St. Jude tells us what happened to the fallen angels: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude v. 6). Satan/Lucifer or whatever he is called, thus left the path of Truth, which united him with the Source of all Life and Light, and he and his followers entered the path of devastation. They overlooked that they owed all to the Creator and lurk about waiting for opportunities to sidetrack God's people. Paul notifies us that "Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness ..." (2 Corinthians 11:15). We thus need to be alert spiritually.

Angels were created to exist apart from a body and are not composed of any material substance, but are held in being by God, and they cannot decay or die. Angels are similar to the human soul, as they act upon the physical world and have effects there in great and minor ways without inhabiting a certain place. They are spiritual couriers who deliver messages between God and humans, and they are capable of acting directly on material things and can influence human actions in diverse ways. We are never to worship angels but we can venerate them due to their excellence. Only the Triune Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is worthy of our adoration and total devotion (Revelation 4:11). Paul counsels us not to be cuckolded or allured into the worship of Angels. Neither should we be spoiled of our rewards due to angels seemingly teaching us another gospel or any other doctrine (Colossians 2:18; Galatians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1, 2). It is the *Paraclete* who reinforces us with "power" from on high and "might in the inner man" and who "seals" us as God's possession until the day of our redemption (Ephesians 3:14-21; Ephesians 1:13-14). Jesus Christ is higher than any angel since He is God the Creator (Hebrews 1:4; Colossians 1:15-17). Through Christ's incarnation He was made lower for a little while (Hebrews 2:9), but only in the human aspect of His dual "God-man" role. Through his death, burial, and Glorious Resurrection, and ascension, Jesus is far superior to any angel (1 Corinthians 15:45-48; Ephesians 1:20-22; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Colossians, 2:15). As the glorified and exalted God-man He became the last Adam and the head of the 'second race' of a restored and atoned humanity through the Cross.

God who fashioned humanity out of His immeasurable love also fashioned the angels out of this love. Angels are a small reflection of God's glory and are present to serve as His messengers and God tells us "when the stars were created, all my angels were glorifying me and praising me"



(Job 38:7). The Church teaches that belief in angels is an indispensable element of Christian faith. It maintains that angels truly exist as personal, spiritual beings and have been revealed to us by God to increase our faith. Essentially, the Logos of God, Jesus Christ created angels because, "for by Him were all things created, that are in heavens, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16). St. Gregory of Nyssa enlightens us when he says that a spiritual life allows our spirit to enter the world of the angels. We consequently need angels to help us overcome our many passions, since we are imperfect. (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*).

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