

Angelology: The Catholic Understanding of God's Messengers



The Angels

Definition

Greek “*aggelos*” which means “messenger.” In the Hebrew, the word is “*malak*.”

Angelology is a science, though not an empirical science. It uses an essentially scientific method by *gathering data* and *formulating theories* to explain the data. The theories are controlled by the data, which is not laboratory data. History and mathematics are both sciences but neither of them have laboratory data either.

Most of what we know about angels we have learned from *St. Thomas Aquinas*. He was known as the "angelic doctor." He is the closest thing we have to an expert on angels.

Why believe in angels?

It opens your mind and overcomes materialism.

It feeds the feeling of wonder, fascination and curiosity.

It gives us if feeling of security and hope.

They can make a difference in our life even if we can't see or hear them.

About the angels...

- They really exist. They are as real as your pet, your friend, or electricity.
- They are present right here, right now and right next to you.
- They are not cute and cuddly. They are fearsome, formidable, huge and are warriors.
- Their powers are far beyond those of any fictional creatures. They are more brilliant in intellect and they can literally move the heavens and the earth if God permits them.
- There are also evil angels, fallen angels and demons or devils. Demon possessions and exorcisms are real.
- Angels are aware of you even though you can't usually see or hear them. You can communicate with them and talk to them without even speaking.
- Everyone really has their own "guardian angel".
- Angels often come disguised. (*Heb 13:2* “have entertained angels unawares”)
- We are on a great battlefield between angels and devils that is protected and extends into eternity.
- Angels are sentinels standing at the crossroads where life meets death. They work especially at moments of crises and at the brink of disasters for souls and for nations.

About Angels . . .

- We cannot prove the existence of angels but neither can we prove their nonexistence.
- The appearances of angels are not angels themselves. They are either visions or disguises because angels are pure spirits. They are not in this universe of matter, space and time. They are not made of matter. They have no parts; that is why they can never fall apart, die or be destroyed like we can. Angels do not belong to our universe.

- Angels are not human souls without bodies. They are not ghosts. They are a different *kind*, a different *species* of mind, or intelligence, just as man is a different species of animal than fish. Human souls are meant for bodies as angels are not. Angels did not have human bodies in the first place and never will.
- Angels sometimes assume bodies just as we would put on a costume. At times Angels influence our imagination from within like mental telepathy to make it look as if there is a body there but there isn't. The bodies angels assume are not literal, living human bodies. They don't *have* to eat or breathe. They were manufactured by a spirit like a mask.
- Angels were created before the dawn of time. They were present at the creation of the world and some rebelled against God and thus became demons or evil spirits.
- Angels were instrumental at every major stage of God's plan to get us back on the road to paradise (e.g. Abraham)
- Angels are also involved in politics. There are guardian angels not only for each individual but also for communities such as cities and states. These angels are called to principalities (See *Daniel 10*.) Principalities oversee great changes in kingdoms, but there are no angels for political parties.
- Angels are outside of time. Time is relative to matter and they have no matter. Therefore, angels can't get bored.
- Angels are intuitive intelligences. They "just know" and contemplate what they **know**: God, themselves, each other and us. They also **love** God, themselves, each other and us. We will do the same 8 things forever in heaven without being bored.
- When angels do communicate with us, it is usually by suggesting things to our imagination. It is what we call "inspiration." Even though they can *suggest* certain thoughts, feelings or actions to us, neither good nor evil spirits can force our mind or will. We are free to choose. Even God does not force his way in. Thus our free will is both the most precious and the most dangerous gift from God.
- Angels cannot know our secret thoughts. They can't force themselves into our minds any more than they can force our wills. Spirits do not work by force only matter does. Even God did not force the universe into existence. He simply *thought* and "spoke" it into existence.
- Where are the angels? Angelic spirits are mind and will, so spiritual presence is attention and willing. An angel can focus his mind and will on one place in space and be present there. Angels can operate on earth without leaving heaven somewhat like the sun shines on the earth without losing its place at the center of the solar system 93,000,000 miles away from Earth. They can come and go instantly but never really leave us. When a guardian angel goes on an "errand," He does not leave you any

more than he leaves God. He bilocates or trilocates. Angels are not confined to only one place at a time as bodies are.

- Angels are bodiless spirits and therefore are invisible. However, they can make themselves look like anything they want either by manipulating our imagination or by putting on disguises. When they put on a disguise, it is usually a human form—any human form they want or form we need to see. That human form does not usually have wings or a halo. They don't all look alike since human beings don't all look alike.
- Angels are neither male nor female. Since angels have no bodies, they have no biological gender. They can be *masculine* or *feminine* since these terms are broader than *male* and *female*. Masculinity and femininity can refer to personalities or souls. So angels could possibly be masculine and/or feminine even though they could not possibly be male or female. Traditionally God's messengers appear more like God than anything else, so angels are portrayed as masculine because God is portrayed as masculine.
- At their creation, the angels did not have the “beatific vision” (seeing God as he is) because none of them would not have chosen to rebel. When we die and attain the beatific vision, we will still have free will, but we will not choose to sin, because God will fulfill all that we desire in its completeness.
- Angels are not eternal. “Eternal” means having no beginning and no end. Angels are created beings. At the moment of their creation they chose for or against God forever. They cannot change their fundamental choice. There was no ignorance, no emotion, and no temptation for their choice. This is why demons can never repent of their anti-God choice and therefore can never be saved.
- Angels can act on physical objects. For example, they can protect us from physical harm. An angel is present wherever he makes a difference and wherever the object is which that he is acting upon. An object is surrounded by space but a spirit is not. Rather the object is surrounded by the spirit, by his presence, and by his power he can really change things. It is not a physical power since angels have no physical bodies, so it must be a power of mind and will where its effects can be physical. This is similar when we think and will to move our arm and our arm moves.

About Demons . . .

- Do demons really exist? If angels are persons, they have intellects and wills. If they have a wills, they can choose between good and evil. If they can choose between good and evil, they can choose evil. If they choose evil, they become evil. So if there are good spirits, there can be evil spirits. The existence of demons is a defined dogma of the church.
- If the demons are real then spiritual warfare is real and “to the victor belong the spoils”: your soul. It is a matter of life and death. And everything else is not a matter of life and death.

- Demons can inspire fear. They can pervert God's revelations or deceive us with false revelations. The devil can appear "as an angel of light" (*2 Cor 11:14*). They can tempt us through our imagination or feeling. Occasionally they can move matter supernaturally. Demons can *possess* us only if we choose to invite them in.
- There are 4 levels of demonic influence: 1) *temptation*, 2) *oppression* – vexation of the body, 3) *possession* – displacement of the person, and 4) *obsession* – vexation of the mind. A disturbance or nuisance in places is called a *diabolical infestation*.
- Angels became demons because they were created with free will and were tested in heaven as we were on earth in the Garden of Eden. Some chose to love and serve God and others chose to rebel. See *Rev 12:7-9* and *Isaiah 14:12-15*.
- Milton's version in *Paradise Lost* has Satan saying: "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven." God revealed to the angels his plan to create man and to incarnate himself in the man, Jesus. Satan and some angels refused to accept this "undignified" plan and bow to a God of flesh and blood. Lucifer's sin is pride. His motto is "I will not serve."
- Why did a good angel choose to become a devil? The same reason a good person, innocent and fresh from the creating hand of God would choose to become a sinner. It is called the "mystery of iniquity." This mystery is not perfectly transparent to reason. Evil and sin is not rational; it is irrational.
- Temptation can happen in three ways. The **world** (greed for things), the **flesh** (fallen human nature and lust) and the **devil** (pride, envy, jealousy and resentment). Satan's second strategy is to confuse us by convincing us that truth is negotiable.

The Nine Choirs of Angels

The hierarchy of the angels is not official church dogma. Is a reasonable work of philosophical speculation and inspiring work of faith and an enduring work of tradition.

Not all angels are equal. **The first 3 levels see and adore God directly**

Seraphim

These are the highest order or choir of angels. They are the angels who are attendants or guardians before God's throne. Seraphim have six wings, two cover their faces, two cover their feet, and two are for flying. Their name means, "the Burning Ones" because they are so close to God, which is a consuming fire. (See *Ps 103 [104]:4* and *Heb 12:29*). Lucifer was a seraph.

Cherubim

Cherubim rank after the seraphim and are the second highest in the nine hierarchies or choirs of angels. They were closely linked in God's glory. They are manlike in appearance and double-winged and were guardians of God's glory. Their name means "fullness of wisdom."

Thrones

Thrones are the Angels that contemplate God's power and judgements. The Thrones symbolize judicial and juridical power.

The next 3 levels fulfil God's providential plans for the universe

Dominions

Dominions are Angels of Leadership. They regulate the duties of the angels below them, making known the commands of God. Their name means, "authority."

Virtues

Virtues are known as the Spirits of Motion and control the elements. They are sometimes referred to as "the shining ones" and receive their orders from the dominions. They govern all nature. They have control over seasons, stars, moon; even the sun is subject to their command. They are also in charge of miracles and provide courage, grace, and valor. Their name used to mean power, might, or energy.

Powers

Powers are Warrior Angels that serve the Virtues and fight against evil. They defend the cosmos and humans. They are known as potentates. They fight against evil spirits who attempt to wreak chaos through human beings.

The last 3 levels directly order human affairs

Principalities

The principalities care for earthly principalities, that is, cities and nations and kingdoms.

Archangels

Archangels are generally taken to mean "chief angel" (*Jude 9; 1 Thes 4:16*), they are the most frequently mentioned throughout the Bible. They may be of this or other hierarchies as St. Michael the Archangel, who is a princely Seraph. The Archangels have a unique role as God's messenger to people at critical times in history and salvation (*Tb 12:6, 15; Jn 5:4; Rv 12:7-9*) as in the Annunciation and Apocalypse. The Archangels are Michael ("Who is like unto God"), Gabriel ("Man of God") and Raphael ("Healer of God").

Of special significance is St. Michael as he has been invoked as patron and protector by the Church from the time of the Apostles. The angel Gabriel first appeared in the Old Testament in the prophecies of Daniel, he announced the prophecy of 70 weeks (*Dn 9:21-27*). He appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of St. John the Baptist (*Lk 1:11*). Gabriel proclaimed the Annunciation of Mary to be the mother of our Lord and Saviour. (*Lk 1:26*) The angel Raphael first appeared in the book of Tobit (Tobias) (*Tb 3:25, 5:5-28, 6-12*). He

announces "I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the throne of God."
(*Tb 12:15*)

Angels

These angels are closest to the material world and human beings. They deliver the prayers to God and God's answers and other messages to humans. Angels have the capacity to access any and all other Angels at any time. They are the most caring and social to assist those who ask for help. We often refer to these as Guardian Angels (*Mt 18:10*).

Prayer to Our Guardian Angel

Angel of God my Guardian dear,
To whom God's love commits me here,
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, to rule and guide.

Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel

St. Michael the Archangel defend us in battle!
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;
And do thou, O Princess of the heavenly host, by the power of God,
Cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits
Who prowl throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls.