

Angels

And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news." ~ Luke 1:19

ANGELS fascinate us. From television shows and Hollywood movies to books and web sites packed full of information, it is clear that people are searching for answers about them. How they are portrayed, however, does not always give us an accurate picture of who angels really are or what they are like.

Angels are intelligent and free beings whose glory surpasses that of human beings until we achieve Heaven (see Lk 20:35-36). They are spiritual beings with no physical body who have been part of creation since its beginning. As spiritual creatures, they are not bound by space and time, enabling them to appear at any moment in history as messengers of God sent into the world. Throughout history, God has sent his angels to the world as agents of his power to bring about his plan of salvation, watching over the People of God and manifesting God's power and his Word at key moments in salvation history (see Gn 31:11-13; Ex 3:2; Ex 14:19; Jgs 6:11-22; 1 Kgs 19:5-8; Dn 6:20-22). An angel was sent to announce the coming of the Christ (see Lk 1:26-38), and angels sang at his birth (see Lk 2:13-14). When Christ came, on several occasions they ministered to his needs (see Mt 4:11; Lk 22:43). Their mission in this world continues after Christ's Ascension in the life and work of the Church (see Acts 5:19-20; Acts 8:26; Acts 12:6-11; Acts 27:23-25). They come with God's help and make intercession before God for the whole Church (see Rv 8:3-4). Each of us is given a guardian angel who is assigned to watch over



St. Michael the Archangel captures the host of Heaven against Satan

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and protect us (see Mt 18:10). Guardian angels are powerful intercessors and should be called upon for help and strength, especially during times of trial and temptation.

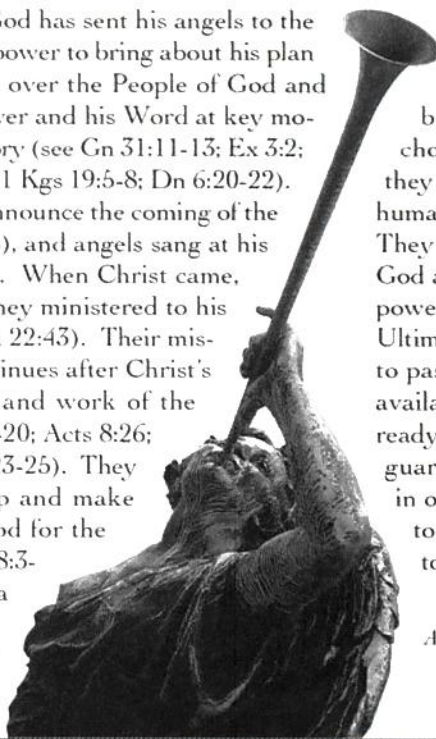
Like us, angels were created free, but unlike us the exercise of their freedom is not carried out in a period of time because only bodily creatures can experience time. Rather, their choice to serve God was made at the very moment they were created. Those who decided to worship God became instruments of God and messengers of his Word.

Unfortunately, some decided to reject God and fell from his presence, destined for the place of "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

The devil who is "the serpent" (Gn 3:1) and called "the father of lies" (Jn 8:44) and "the deceiver of the whole world" (Rv 12:9), in company with all his demons, was created good but embraced evil by an act of the will. Because their choice for or against God was made outside time, they cannot change their decision and hence, unlike humans, cannot be offered God's salvation or mercy. They seek to deceive us and convince us to disobey God and to destroy his plan for our lives. Yet their power is limited to this world and their time is short. Ultimately, God's plan of salvation has already come to pass in Christ, in whose death salvation is made available to all. The battle with the evil one has already been won, and we who are united in Christ are guaranteed the assistance of the angels in Heaven in our struggle to conform our lives to Christ and to cooperate with the abundance of God's grace to make us holy.

(CCC 328-336, 391-395)

Angels trumpet the return of the Savior at the end of time as King of Kings and Lord of Lords



God the Creator

In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ~ Genesis 1:1-5

IN THESE MAJESTIC SENTENCES, Sacred Scripture introduces us to God the Creator — the maker of everything, who himself is uncreated — and to his creation, the work of his will. God created "Heaven and earth," that is, all that is, seen and unseen, the entire material universe in which we reside, as well as every spiritual being who inhabits the Heavenly places. Nothing exists apart from him, and everything that he creates is good (see Gn 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). All that is not God is creature — each of us and everything around us, including the time in which we live and the space in which we spread out. Everything that *is* owes its being to the Creator who brought it into existence out of nothing, without any help whatsoever, and holds it in existence from moment to moment by nothing other than his own loving and abiding will (see 2 Mc 7:28).

Why did God create anything at all? "The world was made for the glory of God¹ ... not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and to communicate it"² (CCC 293). He does not need to create us because he is lonely or in need of our love. Rather, God creates out of his goodness and superabundant love.

St. Thomas Aquinas, a great doctor of the Church, wrote, "[c]reatures came into existence when the key of love opened his hand"³ (CCC 293).

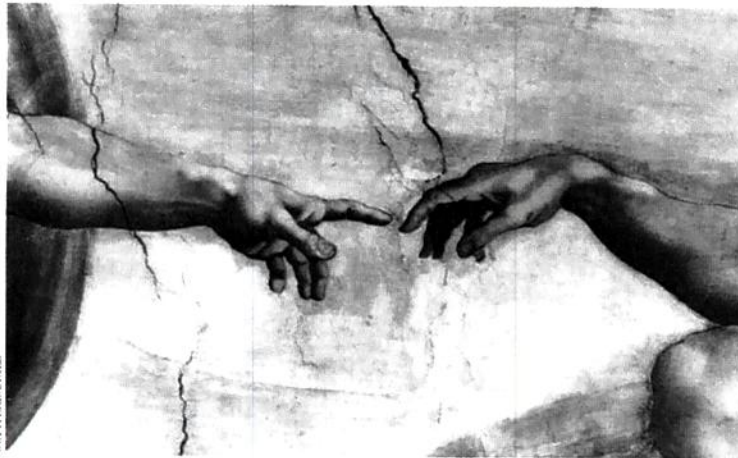
From the laws that govern the entire universe to even the lowliest creature, each reflects, in its own way, God's goodness and beauty and has its own perfection. And, at the express design of the Creator, no creature is self-sufficient; all, in some way, complete and serve one another. The "six days" of creation are symbolically used by the book of Genesis to describe a hierarchy of creation, the inner nature and ordering of all creation to the praise of God, and God's love for each of his creatures, most especially for humankind, the crown of creation.

What does this mean for us?

The fact that God is our Creator means that we owe him everything and are bound in justice to obey him and to give him an account of our lives. We were not created out of any necessity. God is infinitely perfect and blessed in himself and has no need of creatures. He is totally happy with or without us.

"Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life

"Nothing exists apart from him, and everything that he creates is good."



Creation of Adam (detail) in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, by Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1475-1564

¹ *Dei Filii*, can. § 5 from Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* 5025 (1965)

² St. Bonaventure, *In II Sent.* I, 2, 2, 1.

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* 2, Prol.



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and steadfast love; and thy care has preserved my spirit" (Jb 10:11-12). If God were to stop willing our existence for an instant, we would not simply die but actually *cease to be*. Were God to withhold his providence, we could not survive for even a moment: "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind" (Jb 12:10). Consequently, we are utterly in God's power and are entirely dependent upon him both now and forever. As Saint Paul says: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This shatters any idea we may have of independence or self-sufficiency. We are entirely dependent on Divine Providence, who guides us with wisdom and love.

God blessed our first parents and commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gn 1:28). We participate in God's creative work through the use of our sexual gifts. The gifts of masculinity and femininity enable man and woman to become "one flesh" (Gn 2:24) and are

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capable of the greatest possible gift, that of becoming cooperators with God in the creation of a new human person. Thus we receive from the hand of the Creator the gift of a new responsibility, and our parental love is called to become for our children the visible sign of the very love of God, "from whom every family in Heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:15).

God has given humankind the power to participate in his creative work in other ways as well. This is clearly seen in the myriad of human enterprises and accomplishments: the great masterpieces of literature, art, music, and architecture; the great growth in our understanding of the physical laws of God's universe; and communications, transportation, medical, and other discoveries that continue to make life on earth easier. These creative abilities are a sign of God's consistent providence and his desire that we live lives full of joy, beauty, happiness, and love.

God also entrusted to us stewardship of the created world. Stewardship of creation is not only a great blessing but also a grave responsibility. We must care for the earth and adhere to its created order and goodness. It also means that our bodies, as part of that creation, should be respected. Like the rest of creation, they too are gifts from God that are to be cared for and enhanced in ways that respect the inherent goodness and order placed in them by God.

St. Paul, exhorting the Corinthians, says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify

God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20). Stewardship over creation, our bodies included, is at the basis of Christian morality and the starting point of any discussion on the matter. Since God has made us free, we must answer for all that we do *on our own responsibility*.

Finally, we cannot speak about creation without saying a word about the problem of evil (for a fuller discussion, see handout on The Mystery of Evil). All of us have been gripped by the pain of evil — a friend killed by a drunk driver, a child born handicapped, the premature death of a parent. Such situations reflect the reality that we live in a fallen world, a world into which sin, suffering, and death were brought by the disobedience of our first parents. God did not create evil and does not will it, but can bring good even from evil, for "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom 8:28).

(CCC 1, 279-314, 325-326, 337-344)

Made in His Image

When I look at thy Heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet. ~ Psalm 8:5-6

SCRIPTURE REVEALS that only we are created in the image and likeness of God. Human dignity resides in this special creation and is rooted in the image of God that has left its mark in each one of us. Man was created with an immortal soul and “left ... in the power of his own inclination” (Sir 15:14). Like the angels, we have been created for our own sake and endowed with freedom of choice. The image of God in us is represented by our capacity to know the mysteries of God and his creation. It is also reflected in our hearts which are drawn upward toward God and desire happiness with him.

However, the creation account tells another story that describes the sin of Adam and Eve. The tragic choice of our first parents destroyed our original friendship (justice) with God and our harmony shared among God’s creatures, and left us under the curse of death (see Gn 3:16-19, 23-24). These are the effects of original sin that marred God’s image in us but did not destroy it.

Human nature is wounded by sin but not totally corrupted. Nothing we can do can erase God’s image (see Gn 9:6). Why? First, if the image were erased, we would cease to be. While no other earthly creature was made in God’s image, all creatures reflect God’s goodness. To attempt to place a creature outside of creation is absurd. We are either God’s creatures or we are nothing — there is no third option. God is the fullness of being and he

holds all things, even the devil and all other fallen angels, in existence.

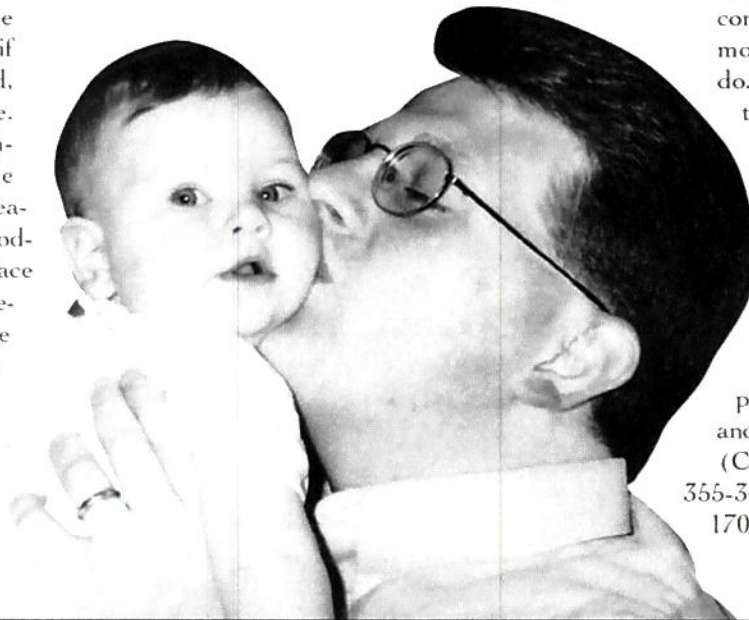
Second, the reason that sin did not thoroughly corrupt us lies in the relatively limited power of evil when compared to the omnipotence of God’s goodness and love. Evil cannot make or “un-make” anything; it can only weaken and corrupt a being that already exists and is held in existence by God. Therefore, even evil relies on God, and its scope of activity lies only within the misuse of human freedom. Evil is like a shadow. A shadow depends on the light of the sun and some object to stand in the path of light. God is the source of all light, and the object that attempts to block it is sin.

Although tainted and wounded by sin, the image of God is still present. God does not have to start over; he can still make us holy through the working of grace (see Eph 1:4), if we choose to cooperate with him. Freedom has been given to us by God so that we can change, convert, and become who we were created to be. Being holy

and becoming saints is exactly why God created us. In one sense, there is nothing extraordinary about becoming a saint; it is the most natural thing to do. Practicing the virtues and keeping the commandments are essential to bringing to perfection the image of God inside each one of us. Practicing virtue is a sign that we are on the right path toward holiness and perfection in God.

(CCC 225, 339, 343, 355-368, 400, 405, 1700-1709, 1730, 1877)

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Beauty

*The Heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

~ Psalm 19:1

BEAUTY IS A QUALITY OF UNIVERSAL APPEAL. Our language is replete with adjectives of appreciation: a beautiful woman, an adorable baby, a lovely person, a gorgeous sunset — all descriptions of our awareness of a beauty not of our making.

True beauty, no matter what its kind or nature, is not our creation, but the creation of God. All beauty, whether supernatural or natural, is a reflection of the glory and grandeur of God himself. God *is* beauty, just as he is omnipotence (all power), omniscience (all knowledge), goodness, truth, wisdom, justice, mercy, and love. All of God's works, his creations, partake of his nature. All beauty emanates from the God who is Beauty.

God, wishing to share the riches of his divinity, poured forth love in creation. He began with the establishment of order and beauty in the universe. From nothing, he created the Heavens, and the seas, and the earth; the sun, the moon, and the stars; and all the creatures of the earth, sea, and sky — and he saw them, loved them, and pronounced them good (see Gn 1:1-31) — partakers of all of his own goodness and splendor. Created things reflect their maker, as is poetically expressed in Scripture: *"The stars shone in their watches, and were glad; he called them, and they said, 'Here we are!' They shone with gladness for him who made them. This is our God; no other can be compared to him!"* (Bar 3:34-35). We should eas-

ily be able to go from created wonders to the Creator of wonders.

The beauty of the universe, its order and harmony, have opened our eyes to the discovery of the laws of nature. Perceptive scholars and scientists admire what they have seen, and are inspired to respect the created world and its creatures, and thus their Creator.

For all of us on earth, the splendor of creation, such as a mountain meadow or a glorious sunrise or an arching rainbow, delights the eye and mind, and with equal ease should lift the soul to contemplation, recognition, and love for so good and glorious a Maker. Truly God *"is greater than all his works"* (Sir 43:28). He is, indeed, the *"author of beauty"* (Wis 13:3).

God's work of creating an ordered and glorious universe was but a prelude to his creation of humanity to enjoy the outpouring of his love. He created us as the image of himself (see Gn 1:26-27), intended to reflect attributes of the Divinity. We are made to show and communicate God's glory, to share with him his own truth, goodness, and beauty, and destined for immortality and the joy and friendship of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus told us that his *"good and faithful servant[s]"* would *"enter into the joy of [their] master"* (Mt 25:21) and promised that he himself would call them: *"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 25:34).



Mother Teresa, by Lisa E. Brown

***"All beauty is a reflection
of the glory and grandeur of
God himself."***

God, the tremendous Lover, gave us stupendous powers. He gave us an intellect to explore, to discover, and to know. He gave us a will free to decide, to choose to do or not to do, to say "yes" or "no," to accept or reject even our Maker. And he gave us the capacity to create new things, to imitate the Maker's own creative power. Throughout the ages, humanity has manifested an appreciation of beauty, and expressed a sense of the beautiful, in art that pleases the eye and ear of others. Art is a talent bestowed on creatures by a provident Creator who desired his creatures to bring forth, as emanations of their own inner riches and understanding,



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creations that reflect the glory of God and his creation, and bear the stamp of his own nature. As human reflections of God's creation, art and music and literature should lift up the heart and mind in love and adoration of the Giver of all artistic inspiration. The inspired creations of the greatest architects, sculptors, artisans, painters, composers, and authors — the great cathedrals with their stained glass and statuary, Scripture in stone, marble, and glass; the sublime Pieta and awe-inspiring David of Michelangelo; the Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci; the soul-lifting compositions of Mozart, Bach, Handel, and Beethoven and the great, formal beauty of Gregorian chant; and the great prayers, homilies, and spiritual writings of the saints —

are the ways we use beauty in worship and praise of the author of all beauty. We, God's only creatures with body and immortal soul, join both in using the beauty of material arts to offer thanksgiving and honor to the One who made us.

Beyond human creation of works of art, we have been given the capacity and the responsibility for the highest and most sublime of creative works. This capacity is a need to truly seek our God. The human body is a work of art by God, and our appreciation of this gift reaches its ultimate goal when we treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul tells us: "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you*

have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

God has given us yet another gift and awareness: that we are his children. We ought, therefore, in appreciating and responding to him and his infinite love, generosity, and beauty, adorn our own souls with this beauty and treasured attributes. By responding to grace — an additional gift from God — we truly make ourselves "like God": "*You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect*" (Mt 5:48). Not, this time, in pride as did our first parents (see Gn 3:4-7) but as a creative, lifelong act of love.

(CCC 32-33, 41, 341, 1162, 2129, 2500-2503, 2519, 2784)