

TRIPTYCH

Angels and the Gift of Being

A Thomistic Study of
Nature, Grace, and Ministry

With the *Celestial Hierarchy*
and the witness of the Fathers

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1 The invisible creation in the history of salvation

The angels belong to God's creation, and their greatness is a received greatness. Scripture places them before the divine throne, beside a traveler, at a prison door, and at the empty tomb. In each setting their action directs attention beyond themselves. The question in Hebrews joins their spiritual nature to their mission: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?"¹ To understand an angel is therefore to understand a creature who receives being from God and can become a servant of God's gifts to others.

1.1 The messenger and the One who sends

At Mambre, Abraham receives three visitors; the narrative names the Lord's appearance, describes the visitors as men, and subsequently identifies the two who enter Sodom as angels. The story moves between the divine promise and its creaturely bearers. Abraham's hospitality and Sarah's promised child remain its center. The mysterious manner of the visitation raises a question that Aquinas will address precisely: how can a spirit appear and act through a body without becoming the body's soul?²

Jacob's ladder likewise joins angelic movement with God's initiative. The angels ascend and descend, but the promise of land, descendants, blessing, and protection comes from the Lord. Heaven is open because God makes himself known. The ladder does not describe a technique by which Jacob climbs beyond his creaturehood; he is asleep when he receives the vision.³

In Exodus, the angel promised to Israel goes before the people and bears God's name. The command to heed him depends on the sender's authority. This pattern helps explain why a messenger can speak with great authority without possessing a second source of divine sovereignty. It also prepares a distinction essential to Christian worship: the honor given a servant on account of God and the adoration owed to God have different objects.⁴

1.2 Fire, wings, and the holy God

Isaias sees the Lord enthroned and the seraphim attending him. Their six wings conceal as well as carry; their proclamation fills the temple; one brings the burning coal that touches the prophet's lips. The scene joins adoration, purification, and mission. Isaias's readiness to be sent follows the cleansing of his unclean lips. The seraph's action serves that divine initiative.⁵

The image gives Christian reflection more than an inventory of celestial features. Fire can signify the communication of holiness; wings can signify readiness and elevation; the covered face can signify reverence before what exceeds a creature's grasp. Dionysius will develop these meanings carefully. His interpretation does not reduce the vision to a diagram of anatomy. It asks how bodily images teach embodied readers about intellectual creatures.⁶

The psalms place angels within the universal summons to praise. Psalm 148 addresses the heavenly hosts together with sun, moon, and stars, and then names the reason for their existence: God's command. Psalm 102 [Hebrew 103] joins angelic strength to obedient attention. Their power is intelligible through its orientation to the Lord's word.⁷

1.3 Personal help and the government of peoples

Raphael's disclosure at the end of Tobias gathers the journey into a single account of providence. He has presented prayer, accompanied human action, and brought healing by God's command. His departure returns the family to

¹Hebrews 1:14, Douay-Rheims, Challoner revision, Project Gutenberg 1581. Biblical quotations in this study follow this witness unless stated otherwise.

²Genesis 18:1–15; 19:1–3; *ST* I q. 51 aa. 2–3. The philosophical question is Aquinas's treatment of the scriptural appearance.

³Genesis 28:10–17.

⁴Exodus 23:20–23; compare Apocalypse 19:10; 22:8–9.

⁵Isaias 6:1–8.

⁶*Celestial Hierarchy* II.1–5; XIII; XV.2–4.

⁷Psalms 148:1–5; 102:20–22 [Hebrew 103:20–22].

praise of the sender. The helper was real even when his identity was hidden; the help remains a gift even after his identity is disclosed.⁸

Daniel sets angelic ministry against a wider horizon. The heavenly court contains an immense multitude; Michael is described as a prince who stands for Daniel's people; the vision joins earthly conflict with a struggle beyond Daniel's sight. The scale changes from one household to peoples and kingdoms, but the subject remains God's rule and his servants' participation in it.⁹

Christ's warning against despising the little ones makes the same order personally demanding. Their angels behold the Father's face. The dignity of the little one is thus joined to the heavenly life; angelology has a moral consequence for how a neighbor is treated. The vision of God and care for a human being appear together in one saying, a conjunction Aquinas will preserve in his account of mission.¹⁰

1.4 The Son and his servants

Gabriel announces the births of John and Jesus; the heavenly host praises God at Bethlehem; the messengers at the tomb announce the Resurrection. They illuminate events whose saving source is Christ. Gabriel communicates the promise, while the Holy Spirit's power brings about the virginal conception. This difference between announcing and accomplishing prevents the messenger's brilliance from obscuring the mystery he announces.¹¹

Hebrews opens by distinguishing the Son from the angels who adore him. Colossians places the invisible powers among the things created through him. Even the names that sound most sovereign—thrones, dominations, principalities, powers—name beings whose existence depends on Christ. They cannot be a route past him to a more ultimate divine reality.¹²

The Apocalypse gives Michael's victory its Christological setting: the accuser is overcome, and the faithful conquer through the Lamb's blood. At the close of the book the angel refuses John's adoration and identifies himself as a fellow servant: "Adore God." The heavenly world is full of real agents, yet the worship toward which they direct the Church is undivided.¹³

Human destiny is communion with this heavenly company, not a change of human nature into angelic nature. Jesus compares the risen to angels concerning marriage; Hebrews names angels and perfected human spirits distinctly in the one heavenly assembly. The Christian hope retains bodily resurrection while opening human life to communion beyond the visible world.¹⁴

2 One Creator, many servants

An angel's invisibility does not place it halfway between God and creation. The decisive distinction is between the One who gives being and everything that receives it. The Fourth Lateran Council's profession of faith names one Creator of spiritual and bodily creatures, explicitly including the angelic creation. It also declares that the devil and the other demons were created good and became evil through their own action.¹⁵

2.1 Creation is a gift, not a division of God

Vatican I repeats Lateran's profession in *Dei Filius* and explains that God creates freely, communicating goods without increasing his own happiness. Its canons reject the claim that spiritual things emerge from the divine substance. An

⁸Tobias 12:12–22. Vulgate/Douay numbering is used; translations following a different Greek recension can differ in both wording and verse distribution.

⁹Daniel 7:9–10; 10:12–21; 12:1–3.

¹⁰Matthew 18:10; *ST* I q. 112 a. 1 ad 3; q. 113 aa. 1–2.

¹¹Luke 1:19–38; 2:8–15; 24:1–8.

¹²Hebrews 1:1–14; Colossians 1:15–20; 2:18–19.

¹³Apocalypse 12:7–12; 22:8–9.

¹⁴Matthew 22:29–32; Hebrews 12:22–24.

¹⁵Lateran IV (1215), constitution 1, *Firmiter credimus*, DS 800–801; Latin text in the identified Denzinger web witness.

angel is therefore neither a detached portion of God nor a necessary overflow that God could not withhold. Creation means that the creature's entire being is received.¹⁶

This confession explains why the greatest angel and the smallest bodily creature share something fundamental: neither exists of itself. Their perfections differ immensely, but both depend on the Creator. Aquinas's account of separate substances supplies a philosophical articulation: freedom from matter does not make an angel identical with its own act of existing. Immateriality answers one question about composition; dependence on God answers another.¹⁷

The council's confession also locates evil in a misuse of created goodness. The fallen spirit is not an uncreated rival to God. Its intelligence and power remain finite creaturely goods, while the disorder of its will is its own. This makes moral evil intelligible without attributing an evil nature to the Creator.¹⁸

2.2 Personal spirits and the freedom of grace

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that angels are spiritual, personal, intelligent and willing creatures; their service is centered on Christ and extends to the Church and human life. Its teaching also holds together the fallen angels' original goodness, their free and irrevocable rejection of God, and the limits of their power under providence.¹⁹

Personhood matters here. An angel can know and love; it is not simply a name for an impersonal force. Pius XII's *Humani generis* rejects doubts about angelic personality and the essential distinction between matter and spirit. The same paragraph defends the gratuity of the supernatural order against the claim that God must call every intellectual creature to the beatific vision.²⁰

The natural greatness of an intellect consequently does not earn it the vision of God's essence. In Aquinas's account, even a creature that knows without bodily senses must be elevated by grace. The difference between nature and glory will govern the treatment of angelic knowledge, love, merit, and perseverance. The most exalted created understanding still receives its beatitude.²¹

2.3 The abundance of created goodness

The multitude of angels expresses the abundance of divine generosity. Aquinas locates their perfection within the good of the whole creation: God's goodness is represented through many beings and many kinds of perfection. The angels have a place in this order before they perform any particular service for us. Their ministry flows from a goodness already received.²²

The same generosity makes the good of one creature fruitful for another. The intellect that receives illumination communicates it; the spirit established in blessedness serves a human pilgrim; the heavenly host shares its praise with the Church. Created excellence reaches its proper expression in communion. The Fathers unfold this order as a work of divine wisdom, holiness and love.²³

3 The Fathers: created light and received holiness

The angels belong to the city whose happiness is communion with God. Augustine begins his account of their origin from that membership: the holy angels are the part of the heavenly city that has never gone into exile. Their superiority to us is therefore neither independence from God nor a separate destiny. They possess already the

¹⁶Vatican I, *Dei Filius* (24 April 1870), ch. 1; canons on God the Creator, 1–5, particularly 4–5. Latin text, Holy See.

¹⁷*ST* I q. 50 a. 2 ad 3; compare *De ente et essentia*, chapter beginning *Nunc restat videre*, in the Baur–Koch Latin witness.

¹⁸Lateran IV, *Firmiter*, DS 800; *ST* I q. 63 aa. 1–4.

¹⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 328–336, 391–395, official English web witness consulted 29 September 2026. These summaries are **Church teaching**; the original goodness and voluntary fall of the demons also have the conciliar basis above.

²⁰Pius XII, *Humani generis* (12 August 1950), no. 26.

²¹*ST* I q. 56 a. 3; q. 62 aa. 1–2.

²²*ST* I q. 50 aa. 1, 3.

²³*ST* I q. 106 aa. 1, 4; q. 112 a. 1; q. 113 a. 1; Hebrews 12:22–24.

blessedness toward which the pilgrim Church travels. This places angelology inside the history of salvation, where created excellence and dependence upon grace belong together.²⁴

3.1 Augustine: the light that receives light

Genesis does not expressly name the creation of angels. Augustine acknowledges this before proposing that the light of the first day signifies their creation and illumination. The certainty that they are God's creatures comes also from the praise of the Creator in Psalm 148; the identification of the first light with the angels is his interpretation of Genesis. In XI.9, the angels become light through participation in the eternal Word. Those who turn away become darkness through their own deprivation. Evil is thus a loss in a good creature, not a second created substance or an independent origin of being.

Augustine's argument begins from worship. The angels stand among the works summoned to praise their maker in the canticle of the three children and in Psalm 148. Their praise is itself testimony to their created condition: they bless the one whose command gave them being. When he connects them with the first light, Augustine reads creation through this already established relation between the giver and the gift. The light becomes a particularly apt image because its excellence is real and its dependence continuous. An angel shines by receiving the Word who made it. To turn away is to lose the rectitude of that participation, even while the nature that God created remains good.

The contrast between light and darkness accordingly distinguishes wills as well as states of knowledge. The faithful angels cling to their common good; the apostate spirits seek themselves apart from him. The spiritual creature does not need a body in order to be capable of pride. Its own natural beauty can become an occasion of disorder if it loves that beauty as an independent end. Augustine's account thus places the decisive division within the response of the creature, rather than between one kind of material made by God and another made by an enemy. Both the holy and the fallen spirits bear witness to the Creator: the former through the right use of his gifts, the latter through the goodness of the nature whose order their will has violated.²⁵

Augustine therefore distinguishes the scale of nature from the scale of justice. In XI.16 angels stand above mortal humanity by their natural excellence, yet a good human being is better than a wicked angel. The will's adherence to God determines the creature's moral good. Knowledge and power become blessed through their right order to the one who gives them.

In XI.10 Augustine explains why even an immortal angel remains unlike the divine simplicity. A creature has gifts it is not: wisdom, goodness, and blessedness belong to it by participation. God is not a subject subsequently furnished with these perfections. Angelic incorporeality therefore does not erase the distinction between having life and being the source of life. Aquinas develops that distinction when he denies that an angel's act of understanding is its substance or its existence (*ST* I q. 54 aa. 1–2). The absence of bodily parts is not the absence of every created composition.

This distinction is also an account of angelic happiness. Augustine's examples of a vessel and its contents, air and its light, and a mind and its wisdom show what it means for a creature to receive a perfection. The blessed angel's wisdom is no passing illusion: God makes the creature truly wise. Yet the wisdom points beyond the subject that possesses it. In God, life and wisdom are not gifts added to an already existing subject; he is the living good from whom their created participation comes. The angel's happiness therefore consists in adhering to a good greater than itself. Its freedom is perfected in that adherence, and its praise confesses the truth of its own being.

Augustine's account of knowledge adds a second distinction. Angels know creatures in the eternal Word, and also in the creatures' own being. In XI.29 he compares knowing a figure in the art that produces it with knowing the figure drawn on paper. The creature's own reality is good, but knowledge of it in its divine cause is clearer. When the knowledge of created things returns to the Creator in praise, evening gives way to morning. Aquinas receives this interpretation in his treatment of morning and evening knowledge (*ST* I q. 58 aa. 6–7). These terms describe modes of angelic knowing, not the alternation of sunlight and darkness in an angel's environment.

The angels' knowledge of themselves follows the same pattern. They know themselves more perfectly in the Word than through their own created being considered by itself. Their highest knowledge is thus inseparable from humility: they understand their excellence by understanding its source. Augustine includes their knowledge of the Trinity in this account. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present to their understanding as the one God, and the eternal reasons of creatures are seen in the Wisdom through whom those creatures exist. The celestial city is united by this

²⁴Augustine, *City of God* XI.9, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871).

²⁵Augustine, *City of God* XI.15–17.

common truth, not merely by the coordinated labor of many powerful individuals. Its contemplation issues in praise, and its praise rightly orders what it knows.²⁶

The same theological distinction governs perseverance. Augustine knows that the holy angels will not fall, but XI.13 considers alternative explanations of the relation between their original condition, the fall of others, and assurance of endless blessedness. His argument rejects an evil nature created by an evil source while leaving parts of the chronology under discussion. Aquinas's later determination about the first acts of angels must accordingly be read as a determination within this inherited discussion, not as a chronology already supplied in every detail by Augustine.²⁷

3.2 Basil: the Spirit perfects the heavenly hosts

Basil considers the angels while defending the inseparability of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. In *On the Holy Spirit* XVI.37–38, their sanctification provides an argument for the Spirit's divine dignity. The angels are holy through the Spirit; the Spirit is not one more recipient within their company. Basil speaks of the Father's originating causality, the Son's creative operation, and the Spirit's perfecting presence, immediately excluding the suggestion of three independent first principles or a defective work completed by another agent. Their creation and holiness manifest the one divine action.²⁸

Angelic perfection, for Basil, includes sanctification and abiding in it. Prophecy, the announcement of mysteries, the praise sung by seraphim, and the concord of the heavenly hosts all depend upon the Spirit. Gabriel's knowledge of the future is a received gift, not a natural possession of every possible event. This is a theology of sustained dependence: angelic order itself would dissolve without the divine giver of holiness. Aquinas's distinction between natural knowledge and revealed mysteries, and his teaching that an angel needs grace to attain supernatural beatitude, answer related questions with a more differentiated account of faculties and ends (*ST* I q. 57 aa. 3, 5; q. 62 a. 2).

Basil's illustration is the iron made hot by fire. The heat really belongs to the iron, while iron and fire remain distinguishable. So the sanctification of the angels is truly theirs without being identical to the substance they received in creation. This provides the force of his argument against treating the Spirit as one of the ministering powers. The angels' excellence is a communicated holiness; the Spirit is its giver. The dependence appears at the summit of creation as surely as among the human recipients of spiritual gifts. Holiness does not cease to be received because its recipient is exalted.

Basil then draws the whole activity of heaven into the argument. Without the Spirit, angels could not give glory to God at the Nativity; the seraphim could not sing their threefold acclamation of holiness; the heavenly powers could not behold the Father's face and live their blessed life. Their concord resembles the order of an army under its commander and the harmony of a chorus under its leader. These comparisons disclose an actively sustained union. The Spirit supplies the light through which the mind sees and the holiness through which free spirits remain ordered to the good. Withdraw that gift in thought, and the supposed self-sufficiency of the heavenly world vanishes.

The resulting vision joins worship and service. A spirit's announcement of a mystery and its praise of the divine giver are two expressions of the same received illumination. Gabriel teaches because he has first received; the seraph burns with a holiness that comes from God; each order's distinct excellence contributes to the concord of the whole. The doctrine of angels thereby serves Basil's confession of the Trinity. Their splendor makes the Spirit's sanctifying power manifest, and their ordered freedom displays the goodness of the one divine action.²⁹

Basil also calls the angelic substance, tentatively, an aerial spirit or immaterial fire. His principal contrast here is between the created heavenly powers and the sanctifying Spirit: the powers receive holiness, while the Spirit sanctifies them. Aquinas determines the further question whether an angel contains any matter in *ST* I q. 50 a. 2. Basil's account establishes the angels' dependence upon God in the excellence of their holiness and the order of their common life.

²⁶Augustine, *City of God* XI.9–10, 29.

²⁷Augustine, *City of God* XI.9–10, 13, 29; compare *ST* I q. 62 aa. 1, 8; q. 63 aa. 5–6.

²⁸Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* XVI.37–38, trans. Blomfield Jackson, *NPNF*, second series, vol. VIII (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), CCEL transcription.

²⁹Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* XVI.38.

4 The *Celestial Hierarchy*

The author received as Dionysius the Areopagite speaks under the identity of Paul's Athenian convert (Acts 17:34). Aquinas receives him within that apostolic tradition. Historical criticism places the corpus in the late fifth or early sixth century; its engagement with Proclus is an important reason for distinguishing its author from the first-century convert.³⁰

4.1 I: illumination that gathers its recipients

*That every divine illumination, whilst going forth lovingly to the objects of its forethought under various forms, remains simplex. Nor is this all. It also unifies the things illuminated.*³¹

The opening movement is from the Father of lights through Jesus, the light who gives access to the Father. Every "gift of goodness" (I.1, p. 1) comes from that source. Multiplicity belongs to the gifts and their recipients; God does not break into pieces as creatures participate in his light. Illumination draws those recipients into unity with their source and with one another. The book therefore begins with divine generosity, before it distinguishes the ranks that receive it.

Human beings need sensible mediation. Scriptural images and sacred rites accommodate an embodied intelligence, drawing it through visible arrangements toward intelligible truth. They neither imprison God in an image nor become dispensable merely because the intended truth is spiritual. The heavenly hierarchy supplies a pattern for this ascent; the earthly hierarchy expresses that pattern under conditions appropriate to us.

Aquinas expressly uses this chapter in *ST* I q. 111 a. 1 to explain why an angel illuminating a human being presents truth under sensible likenesses. His account in *ST* I q. 1 a. 9 similarly makes metaphor suitable to human cognition. Reception here sharpens the difference between recipients: an angel does not need bodily pictures in order to understand, while a human learner naturally begins from sense. Divine accommodation is not a defect in revelation. It is one form of the goodness with which the chapter opens.

4.2 II: why the symbols can be strange

*That Divine and Heavenly things are appropriately revealed, even through dissimilar symbols.*³²

Dionysius confronts the difficulty that sacred representations can look unworthy of heavenly intelligence. Scripture presents beings "many-footed and many-faced" (II.1, p. 4), animals, fire, and material implements. Why not reserve beautiful human forms for beautiful spiritual realities? Because a dignified image can tempt its reader to stop at the image. An obviously incongruous likeness announces its own inadequacy and prompts the mind to seek what it signifies.

The method does not make ugliness divine or render interpretation arbitrary. A creature can supply a likeness because it receives some good from its cause; its limitations must then be denied of the transcendent reality. Thus a bodily appetite may signify spiritual desire without making an angel hungry. Affirmation and negation work together: one identifies a relevant perfection, the other removes its bodily mode. The same image may signify different things when its relations and context differ.

In *ST* I q. 1 a. 9 ad 3, Aquinas repeats this preference for less noble figures as protection against literal misunderstanding.³³ Aquinas also explains that bodily organs ascribed to angels signify spiritual powers (*ST* I q. 51 a. 3 ad 2). Both discussions restrain the imagination without treating the scriptural image as worthless.

³⁰Eric Perl, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite," *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ch. 42, published online 28 May 2011, publisher's summary, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521194846.014>; Benedict XVI, general audience, 14 May 2008, on the pseudonym, sixth-century setting, and relation to Proclus.

³¹CH I.1–3; John Parker (trans.), *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, in *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, part II (London and Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1899), pp. 1–4; PG 3, cols. 119–124.

³²CH II.1–5; Parker, pp. 4–13; PG 3, cols. 135–146.

³³The received English *Summa* reference labels its Dionysian source chapter I; the developed argument occurs in CH II.

4.3 III: hierarchy as participation and service

*What is Hierarchy? and what the use of Hierarchy?*³⁴

Hierarchy is “a sacred order and science and operation” (III.1, p. 13). The definition joins an arrangement of persons, a reception of truth, and an activity. Its end is likeness to God and union with him as far as the recipient can attain it. Rank has its meaning inside that end. A superior becomes an image of divine generosity by communicating what has been received; the subordinate becomes capable of receiving and communicating in turn.

Purification, illumination, and perfection describe the hierarchy’s activity. Purification removes impediments to reception; illumination imparts light; perfection establishes the recipient in the knowledge and activity proper to its measure. God is their source without undergoing them. The same language therefore changes its force when used of God, of the heavenly spirits, and of human beings being freed from sin. The definition cannot simply be transferred unchanged to every subject.

Aquinas makes that boundary explicit in *ST* I q. 108 a. 1, body: the divine Persons do not form a hierarchy, since no Person is purified, enlightened, or perfected by another. Among holy angels, purification can mean removal of ignorance concerning something newly revealed, without the cleansing of moral fault (*ST* I q. 106 a. 2 ad 1). These distinctions preserve the productive insight of Dionysius’s triad while excluding an inequality in the Trinity or a residual stain in the blessed.

4.4 IV: why the heavenly spirits are messengers

*What is meant by the appellation “Angels?”*³⁵

All creatures exist “through goodness” (IV.1, p. 17). Dionysius distinguishes participation in being, in life, and in wisdom, then places the intellectual heavenly orders among the creatures most receptive to divine likeness. Their proximity is a mode of participation, not a position alongside God as another uncreated principle. Their name follows their work: they announce and manifest divine illumination to those below them.

This explains the angelic mediation of scriptural revelations. A manifestation can truly disclose God while its created messenger and sensible form remain distinct from God’s essence. The chapter moves from the Law and the prophets to the announcements surrounding the Incarnation. The incarnate Jesus accepts angelic ministry within his human life even while he remains the source of their order. Mediation serves his saving action; it does not place him beneath a heavenly administration.

Aquinas cites chapter IV when affirming angelic illumination of human beings (*ST* I q. 111 a. 1, *sed contra*) and the orderly communication of heavenly knowledge (*ST* I q. 106 a. 3, *sed contra*). But this does not require a superior angel to stand between every blessed intellect and God as an object of vision. In *ST* I q. 106 a. 1 ad 1, all the blessed see the divine essence immediately; higher angels illuminate lower ones about the divine works and mysteries. Messenger language must therefore be applied to the kind of knowledge actually in question.

4.5 V: a common name and a particular order

*For what reason all the Heavenly Beings are called, in common, Angels.*³⁶

“Angel” names both the whole heavenly company and its lowest order. Dionysius resolves the apparent ambiguity through the relation between superior and subordinate capacities: “superior ranks possess the illuminations and powers of their subordinates” (p. 22). The higher spirits can announce God’s gifts; the lowest order does not therefore possess every excellence signified by the names seraphim or thrones. A shared activity need not eliminate a distinctive eminence.

The argument also makes the lowest order intelligible. It completes the ordered communication toward humanity, receiving what it passes on. Its name emphasizes the ministry most immediately apparent to us. No inference follows

³⁴CH III.1–3; Parker, pp. 13–16; PG 3, cols. 163–168.

³⁵CH IV.1–4; Parker, pp. 16–21; PG 3, cols. 177–182.

³⁶CH V, unnumbered; Parker, pp. 21–22; PG 3, cols. 195–196.

that other angels are inactive or that the lowest are outside divine communion. Their work belongs to the same movement of reception and communication described in chapter III.

Aquinas offers a closely related account in *ST* I q. 108 a. 5: a perfection can belong to a subject properly, by participation, or in a more excellent manner. Thus the order named angels possesses the common ministerial perfection under the ordinary mode designated by its name, while higher orders possess it together with a more eminent character. The distinction is useful whenever a biblical passage says simply “angel”: the word alone does not establish which of the nine orders is intended.

4.6 VI: nine names and the limits of the map

*Which is the first Order of the Heavenly Beings? which the middle? and which the last?*³⁷

God “alone distinctly knows” the heavenly arrangements in their exact character (VI.1, p. 23). Dionysius allows their heavenly recipients a knowledge of their own gifts, while restricting his account to what sacred teaching communicates to human beings. This limitation precedes the famous scheme. The nine names are arranged in three triads: seraphim, cherubim, thrones; dominions, virtues, powers; principalities, archangels, angels. Parker’s different English words for the middle triad require special care in chapter VIII.

The chapter’s brevity should not make its opening reserve disappear. Nine orders are not nine individual angels, and a human account of their common characters is not a complete description of every spirit. Nor does the presence of nine names scattered through Scripture itself give the reader their full sequence. Dionysius is presenting an interpretation of their arrangement, whose rationale the following chapters develop.

Aquinas expressly receives the threefold ordering in *ST* I q. 108 aa. 1–2. He then observes that we know the orders imperfectly and distinguish them through general offices; God knows distinctions hidden from us, and each angel has its own particular rank (*ST* I q. 108 a. 3). The scholastic account therefore need not turn the diagram into an exhaustive census of heavenly difference. Its general order and its admitted limits belong together.

4.7 VII: fire, knowledge, and the bearing of God

*Concerning the Seraphim and Cherubim and Thrones, and concerning their first Hierarchy.*³⁸

Seraphim signify “kindling or burning” (VII.1, p. 24): an unceasing movement toward God, fervor communicated to others, and a power of purification. Cherubim signify abundant knowledge and wisdom, receptive contemplation, and the generous imparting of what is known. Thrones signify stability, freedom from debasing attachment, and readiness to receive God. Their bearing is intellectual and spiritual; the imagery does not make God a body needing a seat.

The first hierarchy receives its initiation from God with a proximity proper to it. Yet it remains a recipient. Dionysius explains its purification without imagining that it first needed release from sensual sin. Greater disclosure removes ignorance, while illumination and perfection enlarge the creature’s participation. The questions attributed to heavenly beings and their hymns disclose both the reception of mysteries and their return to God in praise.

Aquinas draws directly on these names in *ST* I q. 108 a. 5 ad 5–6. Love’s fervor, fullness of knowledge, and receptivity to judgment express distinguishable excellences without excluding charity, knowledge, or obedience from the other orders. He also cites this chapter in explaining angelic illumination and immediately distinguishes the vision of God’s essence from knowledge of God’s works (*ST* I q. 106 a. 1). Finally, the questions addressed by lower to higher angels establish that speech is broader than illumination: a question can move upward without making its speaker the other’s teacher (*ST* I q. 107 a. 2).

4.8 VIII: authority freed from servility and tyranny

*Concerning Lordships and Powers and Authorities, and concerning their middle Hierarchy.*³⁹

³⁷CH VI; Parker, pp. 23–24; PG 3, cols. 199–202, divided there into sections 1–2.

³⁸CH VII.1–4; Parker, pp. 24–31; PG 3, cols. 205–212.

³⁹CH VIII.1–2; Parker, pp. 31–35; PG 3, cols. 237–242.

Here Parker's Lordships correspond to dominions, Powers to virtues, and Authorities to powers in the usual Latin-derived English list. Confusing the two uses of "powers" exchanges different orders. Dionysius describes lordship through "unslavish elevation" (VIII.1, p. 31): freedom from servile deformation and a likeness to divine sovereignty. It is an ordered liberty from what degrades, rather than a license to exercise arbitrary will.

The virtues express vigorous, unwearied readiness for divine action. Their strength does not draw them away from their giver; it makes them receptive and capable of strengthening others. The powers express a well-ordered exercise of authority that brings others toward God without tyranny. The common character of this triad is a received capacity for governance. Its members do not originate the divine intention they administer.

Dionysius supports mediated illumination with prophetic visions in which heavenly messengers communicate with one another. Aquinas cites this chapter for the claim that one angel enlightens another (*ST I q. 106 a. 1, sed contra*). In explaining the names, he relates virtues to strength and powers to the ordering of action (*ST I q. 108 a. 5 ad 1–3*). His later distinction between commanding and executing a ministry prevents dominion from being confused with personally performing every external mission (*ST I q. 112 a. 4*). The activity of a superior can be real precisely through ordered cooperation.

4.9 IX: the last triad and providence for the nations

*Concerning the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, and concerning their last Hierarchy.*⁴⁰

Principalities have a "princely and leading function" (IX.1, p. 36), turned first toward God and then exercised toward others. Archangels occupy a middle position, sharing the directing character of principalities and the announcing ministry of angels. Angels complete the heavenly ranks and stand nearest the human order in their ministry. The nearest is not therefore the most divine; nearness here concerns the communication reaching us.

Dionysius extends the discussion to the guardianship of nations. Israel's relation to God does not mean that other peoples have different supreme creators or that the one providence is divided into rival territories. The same God governs all. The failure of a nation to receive illumination is not proof of a failure of goodness in its appointed angel: freedom can resist the gift. The examples of Melchizedek and revelations involving Egypt and Babylon prevent the account from becoming a claim that divine care stops at one people's border.

Aquinas uses chapter IX in explaining principalities and the intermediate office of archangels (*ST I q. 108 a. 5 ad 3–4*). His distinction between the guardianship of a multitude and of an individual develops the implications of corporate ministry (*ST I q. 113 a. 3*). The limit of such ministry follows from a separate determination: God alone moves the will inwardly as its cause, while an angel can persuade through an apprehended good (*ST I q. 111 a. 2*). Providence through a guardian does not abolish the guarded person's agency.

4.10 X: distinction within the distinctions

*A Repetition and Summary of the Angelic discipline.*⁴¹

The first hierarchy's illuminations are "more hidden and more manifest" (X.1, p. 41). The expressions are compatible because they answer different questions. The illumination is less accessible to a bodily imagination and less divided into forms; it is also more immediate and unveiled to its spiritual recipients. To call it hidden is not to say that the first hierarchy understands less than the last.

The chapter summarizes the movement through the three hierarchies, then prevents the summary from becoming rigid. First, middle, and last can also be distinguished within an order and within the powers of an individual spirit. Receiving and communicating are not exhausted by assigning one name to each of nine boxes. Every creature has a determinate capacity and relation to what perfects it; only God is the source of perfection without receiving it.

Aquinas cites chapter X in *ST I q. 108 a. 3 ad 1* when acknowledging higher, middle, and lower members within the same order. Common office does not require equality in every respect. His account of the communication of illumination supplies a related safeguard: a superior communicates the truth it knows according to the lower recipient's capacity, without thereby making their modes of understanding identical (*ST I q. 106 a. 4*). The unity of the hierarchy

⁴⁰CH IX.1–4; Parker, pp. 35–40; PG 3, cols. 257–262.

⁴¹CH X.1–3; Parker, pp. 41–42; PG 3, cols. 271–274.

is a shared turning to God through differentiated gifts, not the disappearance of the persons and capacities that receive them.

4.11 XI: the common power of an intellectual creature

*For what reason all the Heavenly Beings, in common, are called Heavenly Powers.*⁴²

The explanation of the common name “angels” cannot simply be repeated for “powers.” Powers are not the lowest order: principalities, archangels, and angels stand below the order that Parker calls Powers, or virtues. If a higher rank contains a lower excellence, that principle alone cannot explain why a lower spirit also receives this higher name. Dionysius therefore distinguishes the specific name from the general character of an intellectual creature.

The relevant analysis is into “essence, and power, and energy” (XI.2, p. 43). Every heavenly intellect is something, possesses a capacity to act, and exercises an activity. It may consequently be called a power in a general sense without possessing the distinctive excellence of the order named Powers. The same word functions at different levels of predication. Preserving those levels avoids both an artificial multiplication of orders and an erasure of their differences.

Aquinas expressly cites chapter XI in *ST* I q. 54 a. 3, *sed contra*, where the question is whether an angel’s intellectual power is identical with its essence. He answers that created intellectual capacity must be distinguished from the substance that has it. He also uses the chapter to explain the generic and special senses of virtue or power (*ST* I q. 108 a. 5 ad 1). A problem of heavenly vocabulary thus contributes to a precise metaphysical boundary: the simplicity proper to God cannot be inferred merely from an angel’s immateriality.

4.12 XII: when a human being is called an angel

*Why the Hierarchs amongst men are called Angels.*⁴³

The scriptural application of messenger language to a human religious minister does not dissolve the difference between human and angelic nature. Dionysius explains it by participation in an announcing and sanctifying office. A recipient may bear a name derived from a superior perfection while possessing that perfection in a limited mode. The same principle governs the scriptural naming of holy persons as gods: participation never makes its recipient the uncreated source.

The orders are joined in “one harmonious and binding fellowship” (XII.2, p. 44). This fellowship is more than a shared vocabulary. The lower receives real gifts present in a higher manner above it. Yet the mode of possession matters. To acknowledge a participation in wisdom is not to claim equality in the comprehensiveness with which wisdom is possessed. Communion and difference are mutually intelligible within this account.

Aquinas cites this chapter in *ST* I q. 55 a. 3, *sed contra* when distinguishing the more universal intelligible forms of higher angels from the more divided knowledge of lower ones. He also considers it in *ST* I q. 106 a. 4: the distinction concerns the mode of receiving illumination, not a refusal by the superior to communicate its light. A further comparison concerns humanity’s final destiny. Human beings can be associated with angelic orders through gifts of grace without becoming angels by nature (*ST* I q. 108 a. 8). Neither ecclesial office nor heavenly fellowship requires a change of species.

4.13 XIII: who purified Isaiah?

*For what reason the Prophet Isaiah is said to have been purified by the Seraphim.*⁴⁴

Isaiah’s vision presses a difficulty against ordered mediation. A seraph appears to perform an immediate ministry to a human prophet, although the seraphim belong to the first hierarchy. Dionysius offers two explanations. The minister could be a lower angel called a seraph because the purification is accomplished “through fire” (XIII.2, p. 46). Alternatively, the lower minister could attribute the action to the superior seraphic power through which it has received the ability to purify.

⁴²CH XI.1–2; Parker, pp. 42–44; PG 3, cols. 283–286.

⁴³CH XII.1–3; Parker, pp. 44–45; PG 3, cols. 291–294.

⁴⁴CH XIII.1–4; Parker, pp. 46–53; PG 3, cols. 299–308.

The second explanation receives an extended account. As illumination reaches different recipients according to their capacities, the effect can be attributed to the first created bearer of a communicated perfection while being executed by a subordinate. Above both stands God, the source of purification itself. The account seeks to preserve the truth of the prophetic language and the dependence of secondary agents, rather than assign independent purifying powers to competing beings. Dionysius ends by welcoming a better explanation if one can be given.

Aquinas receives both resolutions in *ST* I q. 112 a. 2 ad 2, within his judgment that the higher orders do not personally undertake exterior missions. Gregory's reserve at *Homilies on the Gospels* XXXIV.13 shows that this conclusion was not the only patristic handling of the evidence. Dionysius's alternatives preserve the seraphic character of the purification through either the minister's office or the higher power it communicates. Aquinas organizes both within his account of ordered mission.

4.14 XIV: a multitude beyond our reckoning

*What the traditional number of the Angels signifies.*⁴⁵

The thousands and ten thousands of the heavenly court express a multitude that "cannot be numbered by us" (p. 53). Dionysius does not calculate a total by multiplying the terms of Daniel's vision. The images indicate the greatness of the hosts and the inadequacy of our reckoning. Their number and ordered distinctions remain comprehended by their Creator, whose knowledge is not limited by our ability to count.

The qualification "by us" matters. An innumerable multitude in this sense need not be an actually infinite collection. Nor does the passage license an exact ratio between angelic orders, an assignment of a fixed number to each nation, or a claim that only those explicitly counted belong to the heavenly court. Number here serves the revelation of abundance under divine order.

Aquinas cites this chapter in *ST* I q. 50 a. 3, concluding that the angels are exceedingly numerous and exceed corporeal substances in number. His accompanying argument from the perfection of the universe and the excellence of immaterial creatures is philosophical reasoning, not another numerical datum supplied by Daniel. In *ST* I q. 112 a. 4 ad 2, he also considers the different ways Gregory and Dionysius read the numbers of those who minister and those who stand before God. The textual abundance can be affirmed without pretending that either treatment provides a census accessible to us.

4.15 XV: reading the forms without imprisoning the spirits

The final chapter's printed title supplies its own inventory.⁴⁶

The return to sensible figures completes the argument begun in chapter II. Fire signifies a pervasive, illuminating, transforming activity; human features signify differentiated spiritual capacities. Eyes suggest knowledge, wings an unimpeded elevation, and teeth the division of unified intellectual nourishment into portions another can receive. Robes, instruments, winds, clouds, metals, animals, and wheels extend the same interpretive task. Their meanings arise from the relevant character and action of the image, not from an angelic anatomy assembled out of all the images at once.

Aquinas's use of the teeth is particularly instructive. In *ST* I q. 106 a. 1, the image helps explain how a higher intellect adapts a more unified understanding to a lower recipient. The superior does not merely transmit a sentence: it makes truth intelligible according to the hearer's capacity. Elsewhere, the attribution of organs signifies powers without implying bodily sensation (*ST* I q. 51 a. 3 ad 2). Chapter XV also enters his distinction between illumination

⁴⁵CH XIV, unnumbered; Parker, pp. 53–54; PG 3, cols. 321–322.

⁴⁶CH XV.1–9; Parker, pp. 54–66; PG 3, cols. 325–340. Parker's title reads: "What are the morphic likenesses of the Angelic Powers? what the fiery? what the anthromorphic? what are the eyes? what the nostrils? what the ears? what the mouths? what the touch? what the eyelids? what the eyebrows? what the prime? what the teeth? what the shoulders? what the elbows and the hands? what the heart? what the breasts? what the back? what the feet? what the wings? what the nakedness? what the robe? what the shining raiment? what the sacerdotal? what the girdles? what the rods? what the spears? what the battle-axes? what the measuring lines? what the winds? what the clouds? what the brass? what the electron? what the choirs? what the clapping of hands? what the colours of different stones? what the appearance of the lion? what the appearance of the ox? what the appearance of the eagle? what the horses? what the varieties of coloured horses? what the rivers? what the chariots? what the wheels? what the so-called joy of the Angels?" The printed "anthromorphic" is retained.

shared through the hierarchy and a communication addressed to a particular angel (*ST* I q. 107 a. 5, objection 3 and reply). Imagery supplies questions that require further distinctions; it does not settle every question automatically.

Dionysius finally interprets angelic joy over human salvation without attributing bodily passion to the spirits. Their joy expresses a fitting participation in divine goodness and providential care. Even after this long catalogue he acknowledges what remains “honoured by silence” (XV.9, p. 66). That ending sets a limit to symbolic speculation. The work teaches an ordered reading of revealed signs and a return toward their divine source; it does not promise possession of every secret of heaven.

5 Receiving Dionysius: Gregory and John of Damascus

5.1 Gregory: the orders within the joy of salvation

Gregory the Great’s thirty-fourth Gospel homily begins with the lost sheep and the lost coin. His account of the nine orders grows out of heaven’s joy over the sinner’s return. The angels and redeemed humanity belong to the one heavenly city; the ordering of that city leads the congregation toward repentance and charity. At *Homilies on the Gospels* XXXIV.7, Gregory assembles the nine names from the prophetic books and Paul’s epistles. At XXXIV.8–10 he explains their ministries. Angel designates a messenger’s office; archangels announce greater things. Virtues work miracles, powers restrain hostile spirits, and principalities preside over good angels. Dominions stand above subordinate ranks; thrones serve divine judgment; cherubim excel in knowledge; seraphim burn with love.⁴⁷

The parables give this teaching its center. In XXXIV.3, Gregory identifies the shepherd’s lost sheep with humanity, borne home on the shoulders of the incarnate Lord. The faithful angels are the shepherd’s friends because they keep his will, and his neighbors because they enjoy the vision of his glory. Christ asks them to rejoice with him: the recovered person’s life is his joy. Angelic charity therefore follows the charity of Christ. The heavenly hosts welcome the restoration of those whose earthly weakness differs so greatly from their own.

The recovered coin develops the same mystery in XXXIV.6. Humanity bears the divine image; the lamp signifies the divine light made present in Christ’s humanity; the house is stirred so that the lost image can be restored. Gregory associates the nine angelic orders and humanity with the ten coins of the parable. The governing claim is the gathering of rational creatures into the knowledge and love of God. This gives his treatment of the orders a pastoral urgency: the congregation is hearing about the city toward which it is being called, and about the charity with which that city already regards its return.

5.1.1 The heavenly gifts in the life of the Church

At XXXIV.11 Gregory asks what benefit the distinctions would have if they did not help his hearers grow. He then traces resemblances between angelic ministries and forms of Christian holiness. One believer faithfully teaches the little he has understood; another communicates deeper mysteries. Some receive gifts of miracles, others authority over hostile spirits, others responsibility for directing their brethren. Self-government gives an analogy to dominion, and a mind established in the fear of God can become a seat from which sound judgment serves others. These correspondences carry the account from heavenly order into the ordinary demands of teaching, discipline, and charity.

His treatment of cherubim is especially revealing. Fullness of knowledge finds its human likeness in fullness of love for God and neighbor, because charity fulfills the law. Understanding reaches its proper end in a rightly ordered life. His seraphic figures are those so inflamed by contemplation that their speech kindles love in others. Their ardor becomes illumination and purification: they help another see the good and repent of what obscures it. The preacher’s account of the orders becomes an examination of how generously each hearer has received and communicated grace.

Gregory consequently warns against envy. The person with a smaller gift should seek growth and rejoice in another’s greater gift. In XXXIV.14 the same principle explains the unity of the heavenly city: all the orders love, know, and receive God’s rule, while a particular name marks the excellence especially abundant in one order. Through charity, each rejoices in the good of the others. The distribution of gifts enriches the common life. Aquinas receives this

⁴⁷Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* XXXIV.3, 6–10, Latin text, Wikisource transcription of the complete homilies. The explanations here are paraphrases, not a received English translation.

account in *ST* I q. 108 a. 5; the names distinguish modes of excellence within a communion already perfected by love.⁴⁸

His ascending list places virtues below powers and principalities above them. Dionysius places virtues above powers and principalities below them. Aquinas recognizes the exchange in *ST* I q. 108 a. 6, relating Dionysius's sequence to Ephesians 1:21 and Gregory's to Colossians 1:16. He then argues that the difference diminishes when the functions attached to each name are compared.

Gregory also records a limit to his ascent. Having reported Dionysius's account of the highest orders remaining within contemplation, he considers the seraph sent to Isaiah. In XXXIV.13 he declines to settle whether cherubim and seraphim act personally or through subordinate ministers when clear testimony does not decide it. He firmly affirms that angels send other angels, and that a mission does not deprive its bearer of inward contemplation. Aquinas adopts the more definite Dionysian account in *ST* I q. 112 a. 2.

5.2 John of Damascus: nature, grace, and an acknowledged unknown

John's *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.3 gathers creation, freedom, illumination, location, ministry, and the nine orders into one compact account. Angels are created through the Word, perfected through the Spirit, and incapable of creating another essence. Their mobility and service express obedience to God. Their present stability in goodness is by grace and nearness to God, not the self-sufficiency of an uncreated nature. John expressly receives Dionysius's three triads.⁴⁹

5.2.1 Intellectual life and obedient presence

John describes the angels as secondary intelligible lights derived from the first light. Their knowledge is communicable without tongues or ears: one spirit makes its thought known to another through an intellectual act. The account joins immateriality with personal life. An angel has understanding and freedom, receives illumination, and wills the good it serves. Its obedience is an intelligent readiness. The imagery of fire expresses the warmth, keenness, and upward movement of this desire for God.

Their presence is likewise spiritual and finite. Walls and doors do not confine them, but only God is unlimited without qualification. An angel acts where it is assigned; its freedom from bodily extension does not give it divine omnipresence. John therefore speaks of their places according to the mode of an intellect's presence and operation. Aquinas develops a precise account of this relation in *ST* I q. 52 aa. 1–2: angelic presence in a place is understood through the application of power, and a determinate created power does not occupy every place at once. The swift arrival of a heavenly messenger testifies to its obedience and ability, while the universality of providence belongs to God.

John gathers their ministries under divine praise and fulfillment of the divine will. Nations and regions are entrusted to their care; human affairs receive their help; divine mysteries are announced under forms suited to the recipient's sight. The same spirits who minister behold God according to their capacity, and John calls this vision their nourishment. Their service arises within a life satisfied by the divine good. Heaven's activity is consequently understood from its end: the spirits carry out God's will because their intellectual life is ordered toward him.⁵⁰

He calls the angel incorporeal, yet says that compared with God every creature is dense and material. Aquinas treats that relative expression in *ST* I q. 50 a. 1 ad 1: even an incorporeal creature falls short of divine simplicity. A second difference is less readily reduced to vocabulary. John says that whether angels are equal in essence or differ is known to God, while recognizing their unequal illumination and rank. Aquinas argues positively that each angel differs specifically from every other (*ST* I q. 50 a. 4). John's acknowledged unknown and Aquinas's philosophical determination have different force.

John favors the creation of angels before the visible world; Aquinas prefers their creation together with corporeal creatures as parts of one universe, while recognizing the contrary patristic opinion (*ST* I q. 61 a. 3). In II.4 John

⁴⁸Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia* XXXIV.3, 6, 11–14.

⁴⁹John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.3–4, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, *NPNF*, second series, vol. IX (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), CCEL transcription.

⁵⁰John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.3.

makes the demons' wickedness a voluntary departure from an originally good nature. Their power remains subject to divine permission, and their predictions do not amount to omniscience. The same created nature that makes an angel excellent also sets the limits of a fallen angel's power. The evil will does not establish another god, another principle of being, or another providence.

5.2.2 The fall and the boundary of hostile power

John's account of evil in II.4 follows directly from this account of created goodness. The devil received a good nature and an honorable office; his rebellion was a departure from that gift. Darkness supplies the analogy because it is the absence of light. The rebel's will turns a good created power toward a disordered end, and other spirits follow him through their own choice. God remains the cause of their being and natural excellence, while the defect of their action belongs to the will that abandons its rule.

Their hostility has a real but bounded place in providence. John recalls the trials of Job and the Gospel account of the swine: the demons act under permission. Their knowledge also remains created. An angel announces the future when God reveals it; a demon may report an event observed at a distance or make an inference that proves false. John thereby distinguishes divine foreknowledge, communicated prophecy, and creaturely conjecture. He locates the practical consequence in fidelity: even a true prediction does not make a hostile spirit a trustworthy guide.

Temptation similarly does not compel consent. The attack can be received or resisted; its force does not make the tempter lord of the human will. Aquinas's account of demonic assault preserves the distinction between temptation and the inward movement of the will (*ST* I q. 114 aa. 1–3; q. 111 a. 2). John closes by comparing the angels' fall with human death as a boundary beyond which repentance does not follow. Aquinas receives that comparison while supplying his own account of the firmness of an angelic choice (*ST* I q. 64 a. 2). The conclusion belongs to a theology of judgment: created freedom is weighty because it is ordered to an enduring end, and divine grace perfects that freedom in the holy angels' stable adherence to God.⁵¹

6 A creature without a body: substance, presence, and movement

6.1 What remains when bodily parts are removed? (Question 50)

Imagine removing every bodily feature from a familiar picture of an angel: wings, face, luminous clothing, even the outline that distinguishes a figure from its background. What remains is not an invisible version of the same picture. Aquinas asks us to think of a creature whose acts of understanding and willing belong to no bodily organ. The difficulty is partly our own: imagination presents shapes, whereas intellect can grasp what no shape adequately represents. The inability to picture a spirit is therefore no proof that spirit is impossible. Aquinas begins with the intelligible likeness of creatures to their intelligent Creator, not with an unusually fine kind of matter.⁵²

An angel is a *substance*: someone who exists, rather than a quality inhering in someone else. But an angel is not God. This immediately raises the hardest objection in article 2. If the angel has no matter to receive a form, is the angel pure actuality, with nothing received or dependent? Aquinas answers by distinguishing two compositions. In a bodily substance, matter and form constitute the nature; the resulting nature also receives existence. An angel lacks the first composition but retains the second. What an angel is does not explain, by itself, that the angel exists. Its essence stands to received existence as potency to act. Here *potency* means capacity for actuality, not merely muscular power or a future possibility.⁵³

Aquinas's *De ente et essentia* makes the distinction especially concrete. One can understand what a thing would be while still asking whether it exists. With a created separate substance, immateriality removes matter from its constitution; it does not remove its need for a giver of existence. This is why "pure spirit" and "pure act" cannot be interchanged. The first may describe an angel; the second belongs to God alone.

⁵¹ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.4.

⁵² *ST* I q. 50 a. 1, corpus and replies; the argument concerns the intelligible perfection of creation.

⁵³ *ST* I q. 50 a. 2, especially ad 3. Compare *De ente et essentia*, cap. 3, beginning *Nunc restat videre*, and cap. 4, beginning *Hic igitur visis*, in the Baur-Koch text reproduced by Corpus Thomisticum; chapter divisions differ in other editions.

Article 3 then breaks the habit of counting angels by their usefulness to us. Aquinas rejects a census limited to the movers needed for the heavens. Spiritual creatures have their own perfection within God's creation. Daniel's immense heavenly court supports their multitude; Aquinas further judges that their number exceeds material multitude, expressing the plenitude of spiritual perfection within creation.⁵⁴

Why cannot two angels be individuals of one species, as two people are both human? Aquinas answers that, in bodily substances, a common specific form is multiplied in distinct matter. A subsisting immaterial form lacks that principle of multiplication. Thus each angel is specifically distinct. *Species* here names a metaphysical kind, not a biological population; the claim does not make each angel a group or deny personal individuality. John Damascene explicitly leaves their equality or difference in essence to God's knowledge.⁵⁵

Finally, an angel cannot decompose into bodily constituents. Natural incorruptibility means absence of an internal principle of dissolution, not independence from the Creator. A circle drawn in bronze can lose its circular shape because the bronze can take another shape; a subsisting form is not related to an underlying material in that way. God's continuing gift of existence is still indispensable. Aquinas therefore reads Damascene's language of immortality by grace as emphasizing received permanence and, in its fullest sense, immutability in blessedness.⁵⁶

Summa: I q. 50, aa. 1–5

Grade: Defined: God creates the angelic order (Lateran IV, *Firmiter*, DS 800). Church teaching: spiritual nature and immortality (CCC 328, 330). Thomist position: no spiritual matter and one angel per species.

Authorities: Psalm 103:4 [Hebrew 104:4]; Daniel 7:10; Dionysius, *Divine Names* IV and *Celestial Hierarchy* X, XIV, as invoked by Aquinas; Damascene II.3.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas contests Avicbron's material composition in a. 2. Damascene leaves essential equality undecided; Aquinas determines specific diversity.

6.2 An appearance at the table (Question 51)

The visitors to Abraham can be seen and offered food. Must a visible angel therefore have an angelic body? Aquinas distinguishes a body naturally belonging to a creature from a body assumed for a mission. Human bodily life is not a temporary costume: the soul is the body's substantial form, and human knowing begins through the senses. An angel neither animates a body in this way nor needs bodily sensation to complete its natural knowledge. Its assumption of a visible body serves the recipient of the message.⁵⁷

Article 2 argues from the public character of the biblical encounters. Aquinas does not reduce every appearance to an image within one recipient's imagination: people besides the principal recipient see and interact with the visitor. An assumed body is therefore, in the cases under discussion, an external bodily sign. The angel moves it so that it expresses the angel's spiritual powers. This is a union for representation and action; it is not the union by which a human soul constitutes a living human body. Nor is it the personal union of the divine Word with human nature in the Incarnation. Aquinas regards the earlier appearances as ordered towards that unique coming of the Son.⁵⁸

Article 3 tests the distinction against walking, speaking, seeing, eating, and generation. Producing articulate sound does not require that the producer have a living human voice. Moving legs does not make the assumed body an organism. Its eyes signify intellectual perception; the angel does not acquire knowledge through them. Apparent eating is not nourishment of an angelic metabolism. Raphael's disclosure in Tobias 12:19 supplies Aquinas's immediate biblical comparison. The resurrection of Christ is different: Christ possesses a true living human body, not an angel's representational instrument.⁵⁹

These distinctions also govern the article's treatment of Genesis 6. Aquinas follows the reading of the "sons of God" as Seth's descendants and denies that angels generate offspring by an angelic bodily nature. His accompanying physical explanation of certain inherited reports depends on medieval natural philosophy. Article 2 likewise proposes condensed air as the material of an assumed body.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *ST* I q. 50 a. 3; Dan. 7:10.

⁵⁵ *ST* I q. 50 a. 4; John Damascene, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.3.

⁵⁶ *ST* I q. 50 a. 5, especially ad 1 and ad 3; Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* II.3.

⁵⁷ *ST* I q. 51 aa. 1–2; Gen. 18–19; Tob. 5 and 12.

⁵⁸ *ST* I q. 51 a. 2, corpus and ad 1–2.

⁵⁹ *ST* I q. 51 a. 3, especially ad 2–5.

⁶⁰ *ST* I q. 51 a. 2 ad 3; a. 3 ad 6.

Summa: I q. 51, aa. 1–3

Grade: Church teaching: angels are purely spiritual (*CCC* 330). Thomist position: the analysis of assumed bodies and their operations. Disputed: the proposed physical constitution of such bodies.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Divine Names* IV; Augustine, *City of God* XVI, cited in a. 2; Genesis 18–19; Tobias 12:19.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas rejects reducing all appearances to inward visions. The bodily accounts attributed to Origen and other early witnesses in a. 1 require their own historical distinctions; they are not identical positions.

6.3 Presence without size (Question 52)

A person occupies a room because a body has dimensions. If an angel has no dimensions, can the angel be there at all? Aquinas begins with the Church’s prayer for the angels’ presence, then asks what sort of presence makes sense. A body contacts a place through its measurable extension. An angel is present through the application of its power. The angel is not squeezed into a spiritual point: a geometrical point belongs to quantity, whereas an angel does not.⁶¹

The traditional terms help if their definitions remain attached. A body is present *circumscriptively*: its dimensions correspond to the place. An angel is present *definitively*: its operation determines a here, without bodily measurement, and excludes unrestricted presence elsewhere. God is present everywhere by his universal causality. The creature’s lack of size never becomes the Creator’s omnipresence. An angel’s one field of immediate operation can extend over something divisible; “one place” is not necessarily the footprint of a human body.⁶²

Article 3 is consequently subtler than the familiar question of how many spirits fit into a tiny space. Aquinas denies two angels the same place because, on his account, each would have to be the complete immediate operative cause in the same respect. He does not argue that they collide. Several rowers can move one boat because each contributes partial power; they act together as one sufficient mover. Nor are a soul and an angel related to a body in the same way: the soul is its form. His conclusion follows from his causal definition of angelic location.⁶³

Summa: I q. 52, aa. 1–3

Grade: Thomist position: presence by application of finite power, and the causal account of exclusive location.

Authorities: The collect *Visita, quaesumus*, invoked in a. 1; Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* II.3, for finite presence; the soul–body analogy in a. 3.

6.4 A journey with a before and an after (Question 53)

If an angel is present by acting here, movement means a succession of such contacts. It need not mean that invisible material travels through the air. Aquinas allows a continuous passage, in which the operative contact withdraws successively from one region and reaches another, and a discontinuous change from one location to another. In the second case passage through every intervening place is unnecessary. The distinction concerns what an immaterial agent’s presence requires; it supplies no angelic speed in miles per hour.⁶⁴

Neither possibility abolishes succession. Article 3 rejects the claim that the entire movement occurs in one instant. There must be a before and an after: the angel is first here and then there. Aquinas calls the measure of that succession time, while distinguishing it from the continuous time measured by heavenly motion in his cosmology. A discontinuous succession of angelic acts is not simply a shorter interval on the same physical clock.⁶⁵

This also answers a spiritual puzzle: why would a blessed angel move if happiness leaves it nothing to acquire? Aquinas replies that ministry answers another’s need. Movement need not arise from an agent’s misery or imperfection; a perfected creature can exercise its fullness for someone else. Its journey does not interrupt the vision of God.⁶⁶

⁶¹*ST* I q. 52 aa. 1–2. The *sed contra* of a. 1 invokes the collect beginning *Visita, quaesumus*; its appearance here reports Aquinas’s authority, not an edition-specific liturgical prescription.

⁶²*ST* I q. 52 a. 2, corpus and replies.

⁶³*ST* I q. 52 a. 3, corpus and ad 1–3.

⁶⁴*ST* I q. 53 aa. 1–2.

⁶⁵*ST* I q. 53 a. 3, especially ad 1 and ad 3.

⁶⁶*ST* I q. 53 a. 1 ad 2–3; Heb. 1:14.

Summa: I q. 53, aa. 1–3

Grade: Thomist position: continuous or discontinuous movement, always with succession.

Authorities: The descent of Christ’s soul, invoked by analogy in a. 1; Aristotle’s account of movement and time; Hebrews 1:14.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas rejects instantaneous movement understood as eliminating succession, while admitting a discontinuous transition without intervening spatial contacts.

7 Knowing without eyes, and knowing without omniscience

7.1 The knower, the power, and the act (Question 54)

A musician, the musician’s ability, and the performance are distinguishable even when they belong to one person. Aquinas asks an analogous question about an angel, while removing the bodily instrument. The angel exists, possesses a power of understanding, and actually understands. Those are not three substances, but neither are they three interchangeable names. The angel’s understanding is an operation of a creature; it is not the creature’s essence or its received act of existence. Only in God do being, understanding, and substance coincide.⁶⁷

This protects the distinction established in question 50. Calling angels “intellects” does not make them self-subsisting acts of absolute understanding. It identifies the kind of life they possess. A created intellect can have real perfections beyond what constitutes its substance. Aquinas uses Dionysius’s distinction of essence, power, and operation to articulate precisely this creaturely plurality.⁶⁸

Article 4 removes another misleading comparison. Human intellect comes to understand material things through abstraction from sensory images. Aquinas distinguishes an active intellect that makes the intelligible content available and a possible intellect that receives it. An angel has no corresponding sensory workshop. Therefore it needs neither faculty in that specifically human sense. This does not mean that an angel cannot receive revelation or illuminate another angel. Those operations are different from abstracting intelligible forms out of images. A word such as “active” can be reused analogically without importing the whole human mechanism.⁶⁹

Article 5 draws the bodily consequence. Angels do not possess imagination, sense memory, or sensation as organic faculties. When authorities speak of angelic experience or memory, Aquinas distinguishes the known content from the way it is known. An angel can know a particular occurrence without acquiring it through eyes, and retain knowledge without having a sensory memory. Such expressions do not turn angelic intellect into a human brain freed from its skull.⁷⁰

Summa: I q. 54, aa. 1–5

Grade: Church teaching: angels possess intelligence (*CCC* 330). Thomist position: distinctions of substance, power, and operation, and absence of the human abstraction apparatus.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* XI and *Divine Names* IV; Aristotle, *De anima* III; Gregory, Gospel homily 29, as invoked in the articles.

7.2 How can knowledge arrive without sensation? (Question 55)

Suppose an angel knows a tree. The tree does not enter the angel, and the angel does not become botanical matter. Aquinas calls the intelligible likeness by which something is known a *species*. Here that word does not mean the metaphysical kind discussed in question 50. It means a form enabling knowledge. The same Latin term answers two different questions: what kind of being something is, and through what intelligible likeness it is known.

An angel cannot know every other thing merely by being itself. Its essence is finite; it does not contain every creature’s perfection as the divine essence does. Article 1 therefore distinguishes the angel’s own substance from the intelligible

⁶⁷*ST* I q. 54 aa. 1–3. The musician comparison illustrates the distinctions; it does not supply an account of angelic habit acquisition.

⁶⁸*ST* I q. 54 a. 3, corpus and ad 1–2; Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* XI, as received there.

⁶⁹*ST* I q. 54 a. 4, especially ad 2.

⁷⁰*ST* I q. 54 a. 5.

species through which other things are known. Article 2 identifies these species as connatural gifts from God, not impressions abstracted from bodily encounters. The Creator produces both things in their natural existence and intelligible likenesses proportioned to angelic minds.⁷¹

An innate species is thus not an imaginative photograph stored before birth. The *De veritate* makes the alternatives explicit: the angel neither extracts its forms directly from material objects nor arbitrarily reshapes its essence to resemble whatever appears. The latter proposal would still need an intelligible principle guiding the transformation. Aquinas's account places that principle in the creature's original intellectual endowment.⁷²

Article 3 asks why a superior angel knows through fewer and more universal species. In ordinary conversation, "general knowledge" can mean vague knowledge: someone knows there is a problem but cannot identify it. Aquinas means almost the opposite. A more universal intelligible principle can contain more distinct objects precisely understood. His comparison is with a strong intellect that grasps many implications from one explanation, where another requires each detail separately. Greater unity belongs to the *medium of knowing*, not to an erasure of detail in the *object known*.⁷³

Summa: I q. 55, aa. 1–3

Grade: Thomist position: connatural intelligible species and their greater universality in higher angels.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Divine Names* IV, VII and *Celestial Hierarchy* XII; Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* II.8, as received by Aquinas; *De veritate* q. 8 a. 9.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas rejects both knowledge of everything through the angel's own essence and acquisition of species from material things. Greater universality does not mean vaguer knowledge.

7.3 Self, another spirit, and God (Question 56)

The fact that an angel needs species to know other things does not mean it needs a copy of itself to know itself. Its own immaterial substance is already intelligible and present to its intellect. Article 1 therefore attributes self-knowledge through its essence. This is knowledge of a finite created nature, not comprehension of every divine purpose concerning that nature.⁷⁴

Knowledge of another angel is different. The other exists as an independent substance; its intelligible likeness exists within the knower. Aquinas calls this the difference between *natural* and *intentional* being. "Intentional" here does not mean imaginary or merely intended for the future: it names the presence of an object as known. The form through which one angel knows another is not a second actual angel living inside the first.⁷⁵

There is a third case: knowledge of God. An angel's own nature bears an image of the Creator and therefore supplies natural knowledge of him. Yet no created likeness can disclose the divine essence as it is in itself. The natural knowledge is neither ignorance of God nor the beatific vision. Aquinas places it between human knowledge from sensible effects and supernatural face-to-face vision, while saying it is closer to knowledge through a mirror than to that vision. Even an unfallen angel cannot cross this difference by thinking harder.⁷⁶

A striking textual moment occurs in article 1. An objection quotes Dionysius as saying that angels do *not* know their own powers. Aquinas replies that a newer translation corrects the wording to an affirmative. He also explains the older wording in a restricted sense. The argument's authority depends on what the received text actually says, and a translated negative can change the apparent teaching.⁷⁷

⁷¹ST I q. 55 aa. 1–2.

⁷²Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 8 a. 9, corpus.

⁷³ST I q. 55 a. 3, especially ad 2–3.

⁷⁴ST I q. 56 a. 1, corpus and ad 1.

⁷⁵ST I q. 56 a. 2, especially ad 3.

⁷⁶ST I q. 56 a. 3; compare ST I q. 12 aa. 4–5.

⁷⁷ST I q. 56 a. 1 ad 1, reporting Aquinas's comparison of translations of *Celestial Hierarchy* VI.

Summa: I q. 56, aa. 1–3

Grade: Thomist position: self-knowledge through essence and knowledge of other spirits through species. Common teaching: natural knowledge does not itself confer the vision of God.

Authorities: Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis II*; *Book of Causes*; Romans 1:19–20; Dionysius and the translation distinction discussed in a. 1.

Contrary opinion: An objection denies self-knowledge through a negative in an older Dionysian translation. Aquinas corrects the reading and distinguishes knowledge of powers from comprehension of their divine source.

7.4 A guardian must know this person (Question 57)

An intellect that knew only “humanity” could not protect this traveller at this crossroads. Aquinas consequently joins the angel’s knowledge of material natures to knowledge of singulars. The scriptural ministry is directed to actual persons, not abstract classes. The divine gift of intelligible species represents things with their individuating conditions; it does not merely duplicate human concepts abstracted from those conditions.⁷⁸

That reach has three decisive limits. First, knowing what exists far away is different from knowing an undetermined future. Existing things can be represented as actual; future free events are not already present to an angel as they are to God’s eternity. An angel can know necessary effects through their causes and form superior conjectures about probable effects. God can also reveal the future. None of this gives an angel natural possession of every future event. The *De veritate* adds that a result contingent relative to one cause may be understood more certainly when a wider combination of causes is known. That still leaves genuinely free contingents distinct from determined natural effects.⁷⁹

Second, another person’s thought is not naturally transparent merely because an angel is immaterial. A bodily change or an outward act may disclose something about a person’s concern; an angel can recognize such signs more acutely than we do. But a thought as freely held in the mind, and an affection as freely held in the will, are immediately open to God alone. Aquinas specifically distinguishes knowing the intelligible species another possesses from knowing the other’s present use of them. Even the imaginative and sensitive life of a human being is not an infallible substitute for access to free thought.⁸⁰

Third, no angel can deduce God’s free saving decisions from created nature. Mysteries of grace are known by revelation. Blessed angels see God, but seeing is not comprehending: they do not exhaust the divine wisdom. Accordingly they receive unequal and successive disclosures suited to their missions. Aquinas distinguishes their general knowledge of the Incarnation from knowledge of all its particular circumstances. A minister can truly know the purpose of a mission while receiving further instructions about its execution.⁸¹

Summa: I q. 57, aa. 1–5

Grade: Common teaching: angelic knowledge is finite, and secret hearts and future contingents are not naturally open to creatures. Thomist position: their knowledge of singulars through divinely given species and the detailed distinction of cognitive media.

Authorities: Psalm 90 [Hebrew 91]; Isaiah 41:23; Jeremiah 17:9–10; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* VII, as invoked in a. 5; *De veritate* q. 8 a. 12.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas rejects knowledge confined to universals, an exclusively causal knowledge of singulars, and the inference from immateriality to knowledge of every future event or secret thought.

7.5 Insight, succession, and the two lights of knowledge (Question 58)

Human learning often requires a proof: first we understand the premises, then discover their conclusion. Aquinas does not picture angelic thought as the same process running extremely fast. In its natural field an angel sees the consequences within the principles. It knows a syllogism and its validity without acquiring a previously unknown conclusion by syllogizing. Likewise it knows what can be affirmed or denied of a nature without laboriously assembling

⁷⁸ *ST* I q. 57 aa. 1–2; Ps. 90:11 [Hebrew 91:11]; Heb. 1:14.

⁷⁹ *ST* I q. 57 a. 3; *De veritate* q. 8 a. 12, corpus.

⁸⁰ *ST* I q. 57 a. 4, corpus and ad 2–3; Jer. 17:9–10; 1 Cor. 2:11.

⁸¹ *ST* I q. 57 a. 5, especially ad 1–2.

subject and predicate. The distinction is between knowing a reasoning process and needing that process in order to know.⁸²

This simplicity does not mean that the angel considers everything at once. Article 1 distinguishes not yet possessing knowledge from possessing it without attending to it now. Natural species are already given; their exercise can be successive. Revelation can also disclose what was previously unknown. Article 2 adds that objects grasped under one intelligible species can be known together; those requiring distinct species cannot be known together in that way. The simultaneous vision of things in the Word extends to what God actually shows, not automatically to everything God knows.⁸³

Can such an intellect be wrong? Aquinas's answer distinguishes natural understanding from presumptuous judgment about what exceeds it. The angel does not misread a nature within its proper intellectual field. A fallen angel may nevertheless judge what God will do as though natural conditions exhausted the possibilities: that a dead person will not rise, for example. The defect is no shortage of cleverness. It is the disordered extension of natural knowledge beyond its warrant. Good angels submit their judgments to divine wisdom.⁸⁴

The last two articles receive Augustine's "morning" and "evening" knowledge. Morning names knowing creatures in their source, the Word; evening names knowing their created existence. These are not working shifts or alternating periods of blindness. A creature considered in its own nature remains good and intelligible, but its light is less than the uncreated source. The good angel refers that created knowledge back to praise: evening leads to morning rather than closing into night.⁸⁵

Article 7 asks whether two kinds of knowledge have actually been identified. If the angel knows a creature's own existence *through the Word*, morning and evening differ by the aspect known within one medium. If it knows that existence *through connatural species*, the media differ. Aquinas favors the latter as Augustine's meaning. Their coexistence is possible because the lower operation is ordered to the higher. Glory does not require the annihilation of created understanding.⁸⁶

Summa: I q. 58, aa. 1–7

Grade: Thomist position: nondiscursive knowing, its limits, and the account of error. Disputed theological interpretation: Augustine's morning–evening reading and the relation of its cognitive media.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Divine Names* VII; Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* IV.22–24, 31–32, as received in the articles; Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 8 aa. 14–15 and *De malo* q. 16 a. 6.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas rejects both human-style discursion and an unrestricted simultaneity of natural knowledge; in a. 7 he distinguishes two defensible senses of "evening knowledge."

8 Freedom, love, and the gift of blessedness

8.1 Freedom without indecision (Question 59)

A creature may know what is good without being identical with goodness. It can also love a good without producing it by that love. Aquinas therefore places will in the angel as an intellectual appetite: an inclination towards the good as understood. "Appetite" does not necessarily mean hunger, lack, or restlessness. It includes delight in a good already possessed. Blessedness can perfect will without making willing cease.⁸⁷

Intellect and will differ by their relations to their objects. Knowing receives the object's intelligible form within the knower; willing tends towards the good of the object. This explains why an angel's will is neither its intellect nor its essence. An angel can understand evil, but can desire it only under some appearance or aspect of good. God alone contains universal goodness in his own essence.⁸⁸

⁸²ST I q. 58 aa. 3–4; *De veritate* q. 8 a. 15, corpus.

⁸³ST I q. 58 aa. 1–2; read with ST I q. 57 a. 5; *De veritate* q. 8 a. 14, corpus.

⁸⁴ST I q. 58 a. 5; *De malo* q. 16 a. 6, corpus.

⁸⁵ST I q. 58 a. 6, especially ad 1–3.

⁸⁶ST I q. 58 a. 7.

⁸⁷ST I q. 59 a. 1.

⁸⁸ST I q. 59 a. 2.

Freedom consequently does not require the delay of wondering what to do. Article 3 distinguishes the discursive deliberation characteristic of human choice from the free judgment belonging to intellectual nature. An angel can choose without an interval of inquiry. Certainty about a thing's nature also need not make every possible action towards it necessary. The good can be pursued through diverse acts, and created freedom has a genuine field of election.⁸⁹

Article 4 denies angels the bodily sensitive appetites called concupiscible and irascible. Yet it does not empty Scripture's descriptions of love and joy. Those can name acts of will without naming bodily passions. Courage can likewise designate steadfast execution of God's will, though there is no bodily fear to moderate. The vocabulary remains meaningful, with a different mode of realization.⁹⁰

Summa: I q. 59, aa. 1–4

Grade: Church teaching: angels possess will (*CCC* 330). Common teaching: their personal freedom. Thomist position: the distinction of faculties and the analysis of affection without sensitive appetite.

Authorities: Augustine, *Trinity* X; Aristotle, *De anima* III; Dionysius, *Divine Names* IV, as discussed by Aquinas.

8.2 Loving oneself within a greater good (Question 60)

Natural love is not a second will alongside free will. It is the creature's foundational inclination to its own good and perfection. Elective love concerns goods chosen in relation to an end. Aquinas compares the relation with intellect's first principles and the conclusions resting on them: choice does not create its own first orientation towards goodness.⁹¹

Thus self-love can be natural or elective. An angel naturally seeks its good; it also chooses particular goods for itself. Loving another means willing that other's good, not merely wishing to possess or use the other. Article 4 grounds natural mutual love in the unity angels share as intellectual creatures. "As oneself" signifies a likeness in benevolence, not equality of intensity or identity of will. Even fallen angels retain natural affinity with good angels while hating their righteousness. Nature's goodness and chosen moral opposition are different considerations.⁹²

Article 5 reaches the difficult question: does natural love place God before self? Aquinas argues that an individual belongs to a good greater than its private good. A hand instinctively protects the whole body. The analogy does not make God a whole assembled from creaturely parts; it illustrates an inclination towards the good on which one's own good depends. Every creature receives all its being and goodness from God. Natural love therefore tends first towards God as universal good. If charity had to destroy that orientation, nature would already be perverse before sin.⁹³

Natural love is nevertheless not charity. God as source of created goodness and God as the supernatural good enjoyed in the vision of his essence are distinguishable aspects of the same God. The second exceeds every created nature. The question therefore prepares the account of grace rather than making grace unnecessary.⁹⁴

Summa: I q. 60, aa. 1–5

Grade: Thomist position: the natural and elective analysis, including natural love of God above self. Common teaching: charity is a supernatural gift.

Authorities: Augustine, *Trinity* X and *City of God* XII.9; Aristotle, *Ethics* IX; Ecclesiasticus 13:19.

Contrary opinion: In a. 5 Aquinas disputes a natural self-love held to be absolutely stronger than love of God, while distinguishing natural love from charity.

⁸⁹ *ST* I q. 59 a. 3, corpus and ad 1–2.

⁹⁰ *ST* I q. 59 a. 4.

⁹¹ *ST* I q. 60 aa. 1–2.

⁹² *ST* I q. 60 aa. 3–4, especially a. 4 ad 2–3.

⁹³ *ST* I q. 60 a. 5, corpus and ad 1–3.

⁹⁴ *ST* I q. 60 a. 5 ad 4–5.

8.3 A beginning received from God (Question 61)

An angel does not emerge from pre-existing spiritual material. Since its essence is not its existence, its whole being must be given by God. No creature shares the Creator's unoriginated eternity. Natural incorruptibility tells us that an angel does not decay; it cannot tell us that the angel never began.⁹⁵

The relation of that beginning to the bodily world receives a more qualified answer. Aquinas judges simultaneous creation more probable because angels and bodies belong to one ordered universe. He expressly permits the contrary patristic position. Gregory Nazianzen describes the intellectual creation first, then the material world; John Damascene follows him. Aquinas's respect for that alternative prevents a theological preference from becoming a condemnation. Both positions confess the single Creator of spiritual and bodily things.⁹⁶

Article 4 locates angelic creation fittingly in the empyrean, the highest bodily heaven of the received cosmology. Its central argument concerns their relation to the material world they serve. The place does not cause or sustain their existence: Aquinas expressly says God could have created angels before every body. The place expresses their ordered relation to bodies, while their being comes wholly from God.⁹⁷

Summa: I q. 61, aa. 1–4

Grade: Defined: creation by God and a beginning of the created order (Lateran IV, DS 800). Disputed: relative sequence and the empyrean account in aa. 3–4.

Authorities: Psalm 148:2, 5; Proverbs 8:22; Genesis 1:1; Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 38.9–10; Damascene II.3.

Contrary opinion: Gregory and Damascene place angelic creation before the material world. Aquinas favors simultaneity but explicitly declines to condemn the alternative.

8.4 Grace before merit, glory after charity (Question 62)

A child may receive everything needed for a human life without receiving everything that child will ever become. The comparison is limited, because an angel does not mature by bodily growth; it nonetheless helps distinguish an initial nature from a final perfection. Aquinas says an angel begins with its natural intellectual perfection, but not with the supernatural vision of God. Article 1 therefore distinguishes natural happiness from consummated beatitude. The fallen angels never possessed the latter.⁹⁸

Grace is necessary even before sin. It does more than repair a damaged faculty: it raises a creature to a life above its natural capacity. Article 2 distinguishes God as author of nature from God as the object of supernatural beatitude. The absence of bodily obstacles cannot bridge that distance. Article 3 favors creation in sanctifying grace, with Augustine's account of God creating the good angels' nature and holy love together. Aquinas judges this the more probable opinion. Grace is the beginning of a free good act; it does not force the creature to use it.⁹⁹

Augustine's argument reaches beyond the origin of an individual good choice. If the angels had made their own will good without God's gift, they would have made themselves better than their Creator made them. Their holy love must itself be received. Through that love they cleave both to God and to one another: the city of God begins as a communion of blessed spirits, and redeemed humanity is gathered into its fellowship. Grace establishes a common life, not merely a private elevation.¹⁰⁰

Merit follows that gift. The angel does not manufacture the vision of God by natural achievement. Through charity it freely acts towards a reward that God bestows. In articles 4–5 Aquinas places one meritorious act before immediate beatification. "Before" signifies the ordering and succession of acts, not a measured probation lasting so many human hours. Article 6 then proposes that the grades of grace and glory correspond to natural excellence. His reason is God's wise and free ordering of both gifts. He explicitly distinguishes this angelic proposal from the varied relation of natural ability and grace in human beings.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ *ST* I q. 61 aa. 1–2; Lateran IV, *Firmiter*, DS 800; CCC 327–328.

⁹⁶ *ST* I q. 61 a. 3; Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 38.9–10; Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* II.3.

⁹⁷ *ST* I q. 61 a. 4, especially ad 1.

⁹⁸ *ST* I q. 62 a. 1; *ST* I q. 64 a. 1 ad 4.

⁹⁹ *ST* I q. 62 aa. 2–3, especially a. 3 ad 2; Augustine, *City of God* XII.9.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *City of God* XII.9.

¹⁰¹ *ST* I q. 62 aa. 4–6, especially a. 5 ad 2 and a. 6 ad 1, 3.

The final articles describe fulfillment. Nature's knowledge and love remain within glory (a. 7). The blessed angel cannot sin because it sees the divine goodness itself; freedom achieves its end without retaining the defect of choosing against that end (a. 8). Essential beatitude does not increase beyond the measure given by God, yet joy in the salvation of others can increase (a. 9). Service therefore expresses already attained perfection. It is neither a new competition for rank nor a suspension of happiness.¹⁰²

Summa: I q. 62, aa. 1–9

Grade: Common teaching: grace is needed for supernatural beatitude and blessed angels are confirmed in good. Thomist position: one meritorious act, immediate reward, and correspondence of natural and gracious grades. Disputed: creation in grace is expressly judged more probable in a. 3.

Authorities: Romans 6:23; Augustine, *City of God* XII.9; Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II d. 3, invoked in a. 6; Matthew 18:10; Luke 15:10.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas records creation in nature alone before grace, and rejects merit continuing to earn essential beatitude after that beatitude is possessed.

9 The fall of a good creature

9.1 A good desired against its proper rule (Question 63)

How could a lucid intellect choose evil without bodily passion or an already corrupt habit? Aquinas's first answer is to distinguish the goodness of the object from the rightness of the act. Something desirable in itself can be sought without the measure and order it requires. Created excellence is good; possessing it as though one's own will were its ultimate rule is not. A creature can turn from the divine rule without first mistaking evil for a good nature. The fault can consist in failing to attend to what should regulate the choice.¹⁰³

Augustine makes the distinction tangible by considering gold and power. Gold does not become an evil substance because avarice prefers it to justice; authority does not become an evil substance because pride refuses a higher rule. The disorder belongs to the will's preference. Asking for a positive substance that manufactured the first evil will therefore mistakes a failure for a new created nature. Augustine compares it to trying to see darkness as a positive color. The defect remains voluntary: a spirit departs from the greater good through its own willing. This joins metaphysics to moral responsibility without giving evil a creator alongside God.¹⁰⁴

Aquinas consequently identifies pride as the first angelic sin. Envy follows: another's excellence appears an obstacle to the singular excellence the proud creature wants. Augustine had already refused to blame bodily flesh for every sin, since the devil's pride and envy do not arise from sensual indulgence. Demons can be guilty of inciting bodily sins in others without themselves possessing the bodily appetites proper to those sins.¹⁰⁵

Article 3 asks what it means to desire to be like God. The desire cannot mean an angel's reasonable expectation of becoming the infinite Creator. Its natural knowledge excludes that impossibility. Nor is every desire for likeness to God sinful: the creature is made for such likeness. Aquinas instead identifies a refusal of the right mode of receiving perfection. He gives two closely related accounts: choosing natural self-sufficiency as final happiness instead of supernatural beatitude, or seeking supernatural beatitude as attainable by one's own power instead of God's gracious gift. The *De malo* concentrates the explanation on the second: the devil would receive God's causality in nature but refuses dependence on grace for the final end.¹⁰⁶

Article 4 excludes an evil angelic substance. God made these creatures good; their wickedness belongs to voluntary defection. Lateran IV teaches precisely that distinction. The devil is neither a second first principle nor a nature God created evil.¹⁰⁷

The next two articles concern the first instants, not a chronology recoverable from a human calendar. Aquinas denies sin in the very first instant of creation. He does not claim that free choice needs a long deliberation: an angel can

¹⁰² *ST* I q. 62 aa. 7–9, especially a. 9 ad 2–3.

¹⁰³ *ST* I q. 63 a. 1, especially ad 4; *De malo* q. 16 a. 2, corpus.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *City of God* XII.7–8.

¹⁰⁵ *ST* I q. 63 a. 2; Augustine, *City of God* XIV.3.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* I q. 63 a. 3; *De malo* q. 16 a. 3, corpus.

¹⁰⁷ *ST* I q. 63 a. 4; Lateran IV, *Firmiter*, DS 800; CCC 391–392.

choose immediately. His argument in the *Summa* concerns the good Creator's initial causality. In the *De malo*, he develops instead the order between connatural self-knowledge and movement towards a supernatural end. These are different lines of explanation for the same conclusion. He then regards the fall immediately after the first instant as more probable, given his positions on creation in grace and immediate reward after merit.¹⁰⁸

The hardest detail is article 5's fourth reply: on the hypothesis of creation in grace, all initially merited, but some immediately placed an obstacle to the beatitude they had merited. This does not mean a blessed angel fell out of the vision of God. The distinction is between an act under grace and the consummated gift that makes subsequent sin impossible. Nor does Aquinas offer these "instants" as pieces of bodily time: article 6 explicitly reckons the succession of intellectual and voluntary acts.¹⁰⁹

The final three articles address leadership and multitude. Aquinas favors Gregory's view that the chief rebel was the highest angel, since excellence can furnish the occasion for pride. He nevertheless permits Damascene's account of a ruler of the earthly order. The leader causes others' sins by exhortation and consent, not by compelling their wills. Finally Aquinas holds that more angels remained faithful than fell. The dragon drawing a third of the stars supplies article 8 with its image of a leader drawing others into rebellion. Article 9 concludes with the greater multitude of the faithful, without fixing an exact proportion.¹¹⁰

Summa: I q. 63, aa. 1–9

Grade: Defined: the devil and demons were created good and became evil by themselves (Lateran IV, DS 800). Common teaching: pride and voluntary rebellion. Thomist position or disputed account: the precise object, first instants, original rank, and relative numbers.

Authorities: Augustine, *City of God* XIV.3; Damascene II.4; Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezechiel 28 in Aquinas's angelic reading; Gregory, Gospel homily 34, invoked in a. 7; *De malo* q. 16 aa. 2–4.

Contrary opinion: Damascene's earthly ruler differs from the highest-angel account preferred by Aquinas. The alternatives concerning grace and first acts condition Aquinas's proposed sequence.

9.2 Knowledge without wisdom, regret without repentance (Question 64)

Punishment does not make a demon cease to be an intellectual creature. Article 1 distinguishes natural knowledge, revealed information, and the loving wisdom that unites a knower to God. Natural intellectual endowment remains. Some divine matters can still be disclosed as God's government requires. The loving knowledge of wisdom is absent. Thus genuine information and spiritual ruin can coexist: possessing truths is not the same as possessing the good those truths disclose.¹¹¹

This explains both the extent and the limits of demonic knowledge. Aquinas denies that the demons ever possessed the beatific vision. Their knowledge of Christ came through temporal effects and was incomplete. When a previously uncertain event occurs, they can know it as present: their new experience does not mean the development of sensory organs or omniscience. Their intelligence remains finite, and their opposition to divine wisdom can corrupt judgments about supernatural action.¹¹²

Article 2 asks why the choice cannot be revoked. Aquinas appeals to the settled manner of angelic apprehension, unlike our successive reconsideration. The *De malo* supplies a helpful qualification: freedom to choose different actions is not identical with freedom to revise the fundamental orientation already fixed. Demons can choose diverse means while all remain governed by their first aversion. Their state as wayfarers has ended. John Damascene compares angelic fall to human death, and the Catechism locates the irreversibility in the character of their choice, not a deficiency of divine mercy.¹¹³

Sorrow therefore need not mean repentance. Article 3 distinguishes willing against a punishment from repudiating one's fault because it offends God. The demons lack bodily passions but can will that an unwelcome reality were

¹⁰⁸ *ST* I q. 63 aa. 5–6; *De malo* q. 16 a. 4, corpus. Aquinas himself records alternative accounts.

¹⁰⁹ *ST* I q. 63 a. 5 ad 4; a. 6 ad 4; compare *ST* I q. 62 a. 8.

¹¹⁰ *ST* I q. 63 aa. 7–9; Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* II.4; Apoc. 12:4; 4 Kings 6:16.

¹¹¹ *ST* I q. 64 a. 1, corpus and ad 4–5.

¹¹² *ST* I q. 64 a. 1 ad 4–5; *ST* I q. 58 a. 5.

¹¹³ *ST* I q. 64 a. 2; *De malo* q. 16 a. 5, corpus; Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* II.4; CCC 393.

otherwise. Their frustration bears witness to the goods their nature still seeks, especially happiness; it does not by itself heal their chosen hostility.¹¹⁴

Article 4 locates their punishment within providence and final judgment. Aquinas distinguishes hell as their due punishment from the present sphere in which their permitted opposition can test human beings. His “dark air” belongs to the biblical and medieval cosmological description; the theological claim is that their activity remains bounded by divine government. A spirit suffers confinement through an unwilling subjection, not through bodily compression. Their present activity does not suspend their punishment, just as a good angel’s mission does not interrupt its blessedness.¹¹⁵

Summa: I q. 64, aa. 1–4

Grade: Church teaching: the irrevocable angelic fall (CCC 393). Common teaching: continuing punishment and loss of blessedness. Thomist position: the psychological account of fixation and sorrow; disputed cosmological account: the “dark air.”

Authorities: Dionysius, *Divine Names* IV; Damascene II.4; Matthew 25:41, 46; James 2:19; Augustine, *City of God* IX.21 and XIX.13, as invoked by Aquinas; *De malo* q. 16 a. 5.

Contrary opinion: Aquinas opposes the prospect of recurrent falls and restorations he attributes to Origen. He also rejects postponing every punishment until the final judgment.

10 Illumination, speech, and the order of spirits

10.1 Question 106: Sharing the light of truth

An angel’s knowledge is personal without being a private possession held against the good of others. Aquinas begins his account of angelic society with illumination: one intellect helps another to understand. The higher angel strengthens the lower angel’s intellectual activity and unfolds a truth in a manner proportioned to the recipient. A human teacher provides Aquinas’s analogy. Understanding a subject as a whole, the teacher divides its explanation into steps that a learner can grasp. The angels do not need our laborious reasoning, but the proportion between teaching and capacity remains. This communication neither creates the recipient’s intellect nor bestows grace or the light of glory. Those gifts come from God.¹¹⁶

Nor does an angel become the medium through which another sees God’s essence. Every blessed angel sees God immediately. What one communicates to another concerns the divine works and their reasons: seeing God does not mean comprehending everything God knows. Thus illumination belongs within the communion of those already blessed, rather than filling a gap between a blessed creature and God.¹¹⁷

Article 2 draws a boundary around the will. An angel can disclose something lovable and so persuade another to love it. He cannot produce the other’s act of willing from within. The power of willing belongs to a creature whose author is God; only God reaches it as its inward cause. Consequently, Dionysian purification does not mean that one blessed angel absolves another of sin. Here purification removes a lack of understanding; perfection brings understanding to its proper completion.¹¹⁸

In article 3, illumination proceeds downward through the heavenly order. Aquinas does not transfer this rule without qualification to ecclesiastical office: a person lower in office can possess greater holiness or knowledge and teach a superior. His account of heaven rests on the correspondence between spiritual excellence and hierarchical place which he does not suppose invariably present on earth.¹¹⁹

Gregory describes the heavenly city as a communion in which each order’s special excellence becomes the good of all through charity. All burn with love, all drink from the source of knowledge, and all receive God’s presence, though their names mark differing fullness of gift.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ST I q. 64 a. 3, especially ad 3.

¹¹⁵ST I q. 64 a. 4, especially ad 1 and ad 3.

¹¹⁶ST I q. 106 a. 1, corpus and ad 2–3.

¹¹⁷ST I q. 106 a. 1 ad 1.

¹¹⁸ST I q. 106 a. 2, corpus and ad 1.

¹¹⁹ST I q. 106 a. 3, especially ad 1.

¹²⁰Gregory, *Homilies on the Gospels* II.34.14.

Article 4 joins generosity to enduring difference. Higher angels communicate the gifts they receive as fully as recipients can receive them; the difference lies in the manner of possessing the truth, not a refusal to share. A teacher and pupil can know the same conclusion with unequal depth. New divine disclosures concerning providence and salvation also give fresh matter for communication before the final judgment.¹²¹

Summa: I q. 106, aa. 1–4

Grade: Thomist position: intellectual illumination and its communication.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* VII–VIII, XV; Gregory, *Homilies on the Gospels* II.34.14; the article also invokes Augustine and Peter Lombard.

10.2 Question 107: Speaking without sound

Angelic speech is the voluntary communication of an intellectual conception. The absence of vocal organs removes the need for a sound; it does not remove the distinction between having a thought and addressing it to someone. Aquinas distinguishes knowledge possessed habitually, knowledge actually considered, and a conception intentionally directed to another. Speech occurs at the third stage. Created minds are therefore not automatically transparent to one another. God alone knows the inward thought without needing the creature to disclose it.¹²²

This permits a lower angel to speak to a higher one. The statement that a speaker wishes to do something makes the speaker's intention known; it need not confer the higher grasp of divine truth which Aquinas calls illumination. Every illumination is speech in this extended sense, but not every speech is illumination. The hierarchy of teaching does not reduce the society of angels to a one-way stream of commands.¹²³

Angels also speak to God. They do not supply information to the omniscient Creator. They turn toward him in admiration and in consultation about their ministry. Aquinas thus distinguishes communication intended to instruct the hearer from communication intended to receive instruction. Praise is continual; consultation about a newly assigned work answers a particular occasion.¹²⁴

Distance does not weaken angelic speech, because it is an intellectual act rather than a sound carried through a medium. This does not make the speaker omnipresent. The operation belongs to the speaker where he is; its intelligibility is not measured by the distance to the hearer. Nor must every angel hear every communication. Its recipients are determined by the speaker's will, not by the reach of a voice. Articles 4 and 5 therefore deny both a physical transmission barrier and an automatic universal audience.¹²⁵

Summa: I q. 107, aa. 1–5

Grade: Thomist position: voluntary intellectual communication.

Authorities: 1 Corinthians 13:1; Zacharias 1:12; Luke 16:24; Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* VII.3. Aquinas also invokes Gregory's *Moralia*.

10.3 Question 108: One communion, several orders

The word *hierarchy* names a sacred ordering toward God. Article 1 can therefore speak of one society under one divine ruler, while distinguishing several ways of receiving and communicating his gifts. Humans understand through sensible signs; angels receive intellectual illumination without that dependence. Within angelic knowledge, Aquinas distinguishes attention to the divine reasons of things in God, to their universal created causes, and to their application in particular effects. These correspond to the three hierarchies. The distinction does not place the Trinity at the top of a ladder of unequal gods: Aquinas expressly rejects a hierarchy within the divine Persons.¹²⁶

Article 2 distinguishes orders within each hierarchy through their offices. The threefold arrangement marks beginning, middle, and completion within an ordered whole. Article 3 prevents this classification from becoming an exhaustive

¹²¹ *ST* I q. 106 a. 4, corpus and ad 1–3.

¹²² *ST* I q. 107 a. 1, corpus and ad 1–2.

¹²³ *ST* I q. 107 a. 2.

¹²⁴ *ST* I q. 107 a. 3, corpus and ad 2.

¹²⁵ *ST* I q. 107 aa. 4–5.

¹²⁶ *ST* I q. 108 a. 1.

celestial census. Many angels belong to one order because our knowledge grasps their offices generally. Each angel has a more particular place and office than the nine names tell us. Membership in a common order does not imply exact equality of natural or gracious gifts.¹²⁷

Nature and grace both matter in article 4. A natural order can be considered with respect to the knowledge and love of God accessible to created powers. The order consummated in the vision of God depends on grace. Aquinas holds that angels receive gratuitous gifts proportioned to their natural capacities; he expressly refuses to make that proportionality a universal rule for human beings. Natural brilliance is therefore no scale for measuring a person's sanctity.¹²⁸

The names of the orders, treated in article 5, signify characteristic excellence rather than exclusive possession. All holy angels love and know God; the Seraphim are named from an eminent ardor of love, the Cherubim from fullness of knowledge. The higher possess the perfections of the lower more eminently, while the lower participate in higher perfections according to capacity. "Angels" can consequently name all the heavenly messengers or the lowest order in particular. Likewise, "virtue" can signify power generally or the specific order called Virtues.¹²⁹

Article 6 compares two received sequences. In the customary Latin terminology, Dionysius's descending arrangement is Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones; Dominations, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels, Angels. Gregory's descending list is Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Archangels, Angels. Thus Principalities and Virtues exchange positions, while Powers retain their place between them. Parker's English "Powers" for the Dionysian *dynameis* corresponds here to Latin *Virtutes*; his "Authorities" corresponds to *Potestates*. An English word alone cannot settle the comparison.¹³⁰

Aquinas considers both arrangements intelligible. Dionysius emphasizes the reception and transmission of divine illumination; Gregory's explanations emphasize ministries: Principalities preside over good spirits, Powers restrain hostile spirits, and Virtues minister in wonders. Aquinas argues that the functions assigned under different names can be close in substance. His reconciliation does not make their written sequences identical. Nor does a list establish that every member of an order is engaged only in the one activity from which its name comes.¹³¹

In article 7 the differences of nature and glory remain after judgment, while ministries directed to bringing pilgrims to their goal cease in that form. Communion and illumination are not abolished when salvation is complete. Aquinas compares the distinction between an army's work in battle and its order in triumph. Article 8 then places redeemed humanity within the one blessed society. Grace can raise human beings to a glory equal to that of angels without changing human nature into angelic nature. The claim concerns participation in blessedness, not a transformation of a departed person into a different species of creature. Aquinas also rejects the restriction of this shared society to virgins or the specially perfect, as though other saved persons formed a separate society.¹³²

Summa: I q. 108, aa. 1–8

Grade: Thomist position: hierarchy and participation. Disputed: the arrangement of Principalities and Virtues.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* VI–IX; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.7–14; Ephesians 1:20–21; Colossians 1:16; Isaias 6:2–3; Matthew 22:30.

Contrary opinion: Gregory places Principalities where Dionysius places Virtues, and Virtues where Dionysius places Principalities. Aquinas's functional reconciliation accompanies, rather than erases, this difference.

10.4 Question 109: Order surviving rebellion

The demons retain the natural powers of spiritual creatures. Article 1 therefore distinguishes natural order, the grace in which the angels were created according to Aquinas, and consummated glory. Fallen angels retain the first, lost the second, and never possessed the third. Their continuing powers are goods of a created nature; wickedness is their

¹²⁷ *ST* I q. 108 aa. 2–3.

¹²⁸ *ST* I q. 108 a. 4; compare I q. 62 a. 6.

¹²⁹ *ST* I q. 108 a. 5, especially ad 1 and ad 5–6.

¹³⁰ Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* VI–IX, trans. John Parker, *Works*, vol. II (1899), pp. 23–38; Gregory, *Homilies on the Gospels* II.34.7–10, Latin electronic witness; *ST* I q. 108 a. 6.

¹³¹ *ST* I q. 108 aa. 5–6, especially a. 6 ad 4; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.10,14.

¹³² *ST* I q. 108 aa. 7–8.

misuse. Names whose meanings imply perfected charity or divine indwelling cannot simply be assigned to demons because of a supposed former rank.¹³³

Article 2 finds precedence among demons in their remaining inequalities of nature. Their cooperation does not imply charity or friendship. It can arise from a shared purpose of harming human beings. Leadership in such activity increases misery rather than conferring a genuine blessed excellence. Article 3 likewise distinguishes communication from illumination: demons can make their intentions known, but do not illuminate one another in the proper sense of leading understanding toward God.¹³⁴

Good angels exercise authority over bad angels because their adherence to divine justice is stronger than a demon's natural superiority. A naturally lower blessed angel can therefore restrain a naturally higher fallen spirit. Aquinas invokes the order Augustine describes, in which the sinful rational spirit is governed by the just spirit, and the just spirit by God. This government permits some harms under providence; it does not mean that the good angels endorse demonic malice or that evil has escaped their Lord's jurisdiction. Information imparted to demons in executing a divine judgment is received perversely by them, even when communicated for a righteous purpose.¹³⁵

Summa: I q. 109, aa. 1–4

Grade: Thomist position: the ordering of fallen spirits. Their subjection to providence belongs to Church teaching; see the Catechism, no. 395.

Authorities: Ephesians 6:12; Ecclesiasticus 34:4; Augustine, *De Trinitate* III.4.9; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.10.

11 Government, mission, and guardianship

11.1 Question 110: Spiritual agents and bodily things

Aquinas places angelic activity within the government of creation. Article 1 argues from the relation of particular bodily powers to the more universal reach of an intellectual agent. His account includes the cosmology of his age, in which spiritual substances move the heavens. Yet he does not confine angelic ministry to celestial motions: the government of lower bodily things also belongs within providence. The nine orders describe general offices, not a separate choir for every bodily species.¹³⁶

Article 2 asks a sharper question: does matter receive whatever form an angel simply wills? Aquinas answers no. A creature's superiority does not confer the Creator's sovereignty over being. Angels can bring bodily agents into action, but their willing is not itself an immediate source of substantial forms. Aquinas compares a cook who regulates a fire: the resulting dish depends on intelligent direction, yet it is produced through bodily processes. Augustine similarly distinguishes God's inward creative causality from the outward arrangement of created causes by angels or human beings.¹³⁷

The immediate bodily power affirmed in article 3 is local motion. An angel can move bodies and thereby bring natural agents into contact or arrange conditions for effects. This explains how the preceding denial can coexist with real angelic action: denying unrestricted command over matter is not denying every capacity to act upon it. The natural capacities employed remain created capacities.¹³⁸

Article 4 reserves a miracle strictly understood to God. A surprising event exceeds neither nature nor every created power simply because it exceeds our experience. For Aquinas, a true miracle exceeds the order of the whole created universe, which includes angelic powers. Angels may intercede for such a work or minister in its accomplishment; their natural power does not produce it as a principal cause. Accordingly, Gregory's attribution of wonders to the Virtues can be affirmed without making an angel a second divine wonder-worker.¹³⁹

¹³³ *ST* I q. 109 a. 1, especially ad 3.

¹³⁴ *ST* I q. 109 aa. 2–3.

¹³⁵ *ST* I q. 109 a. 4, corpus and ad 1–3; Augustine, *De Trinitate* III.4.9; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.10.

¹³⁶ *ST* I q. 110 a. 1, especially ad 2–3.

¹³⁷ *ST* I q. 110 a. 2; Augustine, *De Trinitate* III.8.13–9.17.

¹³⁸ *ST* I q. 110 a. 3.

¹³⁹ *ST* I q. 110 a. 4, especially ad 1–2 and ad 4; Gregory, *Homilies on the Gospels* II.34.10.

Summa: I q. 110, aa. 1–4

Grade: Thomist position: angelic government through created bodily causes, under the Creator’s universal power.

Authorities: Augustine, *De Trinitate* III.4,8–9; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.10; Psalm 135:4 (Hebrew 136:4).

Contrary opinion: The account rejected in a. 2 makes a separated intellect the immediate source of material forms.

11.2 Question 111: Helping a mind without taking its place

In article 1 angelic illumination respects human embodiment. An angel strengthens understanding and presents truth through sensible likenesses, because human thinking in this life turns to images. The angel does not implant the infused virtue of faith. Aquinas distinguishes proposing what is to be believed from the divine gift through which a person believes. The same distinction allows a human preacher to serve faith without creating faith by persuasion. Nor does receiving assistance entail knowing which angel, or even knowing that an angel, assisted.¹⁴⁰

Article 2 repeats and extends the protection of freedom. Only God moves the will inwardly as its creator. An angel can present a good for consideration; with human beings, an angel can also affect passions through their bodily conditions. Neither mode makes the will’s consent necessary. Fear, anger, or desire can incline a choice without constituting the choice. Aquinas’s distinction applies equally to a good angel’s help and a demon’s solicitation: a created spirit cannot seize the will and turn its own intention into the person’s voluntary consent.¹⁴¹

Articles 3 and 4 distinguish imagination from external sensation. Aquinas holds that good or bad angels can act upon bodily conditions of imagination and sense. He explains those conditions through the movement of bodily spirits and humors, the physiology he received; this is not a modern account of the nervous system. His conceptual limit is that an angel rearranges material furnished through sense rather than supplying a wholly new sensory capacity. His example is that an angel cannot make someone blind from birth imagine color. Sense can also be affected through external objects or through changes within the organ. The articles state powers in general; they do not identify the cause of a particular person’s experience.¹⁴²

Summa: I q. 111, aa. 1–4

Grade: Thomist position: intellectual illumination and influence upon imagination, sense, and passion; God alone inwardly causes the act of willing and infuses faith.

Authorities: Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* I, IV; Proverbs 21:1; Matthew 1:20; Genesis 19:11.

11.3 Question 112: Sent without ceasing to contemplate

To be sent is to receive a commission and apply one’s power in its execution. In article 1 an angel’s mission is a new exercise of limited created power under divine authority. Service to humanity does not lower the angel’s dignity: the angel principally serves God, who wills that service. Neither does external ministry interrupt the vision of God. Unlike our divided attention, angelic contemplation supplies the rule for the action; the minister acts from the divine presence rather than taking leave of it.¹⁴³

Article 2 asks whether every order is sent on external missions. Aquinas answers that the higher orders communicate through the lower, and denies exceptional direct external missions of those higher orders. Isaias’s Seraph can accordingly be understood as a lower minister performing a seraphic work, or as the action of a higher angel effected through a lower. This is Aquinas’s definite resolution. Gregory reports the Dionysian account but then declines to decide, without clear testimony, whether such higher spirits act directly or through subordinate ranks. Gregory’s reserve is more extensive than Aquinas’s conclusion.¹⁴⁴

Article 3 distinguishes two senses of standing before God. All blessed angels stand before him in the immediate vision of his essence, including those sent to us. In a narrower sense, the higher angels stand before him by receiving

¹⁴⁰ *ST* I q. 111 a. 1, corpus and ad 1–3.

¹⁴¹ *ST* I q. 111 a. 2, corpus and ad 2–3.

¹⁴² *ST* I q. 111 aa. 3–4, especially a. 3 ad 1–3.

¹⁴³ *ST* I q. 112 a. 1, especially ad 2–4.

¹⁴⁴ *ST* I q. 112 a. 2, corpus and ad 2; Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* XIII; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.12–13.

disclosures of divine mysteries which they communicate to others. An account of mediated knowledge must never become an account of a mediated beatific vision.¹⁴⁵

Article 4 identifies five orders with external execution: Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. Dominations direct the ministry without themselves executing it externally; the three orders of the first hierarchy likewise remain above that execution. Thus six orders may be called ministering when direction is included, although only five execute external commissions. Aquinas also discusses different readings of Daniel's immense numbers. Those readings signify an abundance beyond human reckoning, not a disclosed numerical census.¹⁴⁶

Summa: I q. 112, aa. 1–4

Grade: Church teaching: angelic ministry, Catechism nos. 331–333. Thomist position: the distribution of ministerial offices. Disputed: whether the higher orders ever execute external missions directly.

Authorities: Exodus 23:20; Hebrews 1:14; Daniel 7:10; Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* VIII, XIII; Gregory, *Homilies* II.34.12–13.

Contrary opinion: Gregory expressly leaves direct action by Cherubim and Seraphim unresolved. Aquinas rules out direct external mission by the higher orders and also rejects an unnamed opinion allowing exceptions.

11.4 Question 113: The guardian and the person

Guardianship belongs to providence's care for free but fallible persons. In article 1 Aquinas argues that knowing a general moral principle does not guarantee applying it rightly in a particular circumstance. Angelic help addresses that weakness. God remains the giver of grace and virtue; angelic instruction assists the person's practical direction. A person can resist that assistance. Sin therefore does not demonstrate negligence in the guardian.¹⁴⁷

Article 2 assigns an individual guardian to each person. Its reason is the enduring value of the individual rational soul, not merely the preservation of humanity as a species. A public guardian's care for a community does not replace care for each member's interior good. Article 3 assigns this personal office to the lowest order and distinguishes it from broader guardianship exercised through higher orders. Aquinas interprets Chrysostom's appeal to greater angels as compatible with greater members of the lowest order. Chrysostom himself emphasizes the dignity of the supposedly insignificant people under their care and does not specify that scholastic solution.¹⁴⁸

In article 4, the protection extends to every human wayfarer, including unbelievers and those who resist grace. Its benefits can include restraining harm even when the recipient does not attain salvation. Christ is the distinct case: angels minister to him, but he needs no guardian superior to himself. His human soul is united to the Word and possesses the vision of God even during his earthly journey. Aquinas also distinguishes a guardian's office during the journey from the communion of angels and redeemed humans at its end.¹⁴⁹

Article 5 places assignment of an individual guardian at birth rather than baptism. The benefit belongs to providence for rational creatures; it is not limited to sacramental incorporation into Christ. Origen had posed birth and baptism as alternatives for examination, without supplying the simple categorical baptism-only doctrine sometimes attributed to him. Aquinas decides for birth, invoking Jerome. He judges it probable that the mother's angel guards the child in the womb.¹⁵⁰

The guardian never abandons the person entirely, according to article 6. Providence can permit an affliction or a sinful act which the angel does not prevent. Such permission is not cancellation of the office. Article 7 adds that the blessed angels' care does not destroy their happiness. They do not approve sin; their will adheres to God's just ordering and permission, rather than becoming frustrated opposition to providence. The distinction concerns blessed participation in divine wisdom, not indifference to human suffering.¹⁵¹

Finally, article 8 interprets the resistance of the prince of Persia in Daniel 10:13. On the interpretation Aquinas develops, good angels representing contrary claims seek the divine judgment; their wills do not quarrel against one

¹⁴⁵ *ST* I q. 112 a. 3.

¹⁴⁶ *ST* I q. 112 a. 4, corpus and ad 1–2.

¹⁴⁷ *ST* I q. 113 a. 1, especially ad 1–3.

¹⁴⁸ *ST* I q. 113 aa. 2–3, especially a. 3 ad 1; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 59.4, on Matthew 18:10.

¹⁴⁹ *ST* I q. 113 a. 4, especially ad 1 and ad 3.

¹⁵⁰ *ST* I q. 113 a. 5, corpus and ad 3; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* XIII.27–28; Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 336.

¹⁵¹ *ST* I q. 113 aa. 6–7.

another or against God. The difficulty lies in the opposed matters presented for judgment and in what has not yet been disclosed to them. Even faithful ministers do not possess God's comprehensive knowledge of providence.¹⁵²

Summa: I q. 113, aa. 1–8

Grade: Church teaching: angelic care of human life, Catechism nos. 336, 352. Thomist position: the individual guardian's assignment, rank, and commencement, and the reading of Daniel's resistance.

Authorities: Psalm 90:11 (Hebrew 91:11); Matthew 18:10; Daniel 10:13; Apocalypse 21:4. Aquinas invokes Jerome, Origen, Chrysostom, and Gregory.

Contrary opinion: Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* XIII.27–28, explores birth and baptism as alternatives; Aquinas chooses birth. Chrysostom's greater angels do not specify a choir.

12 Assault under providence

12.1 Question 114: The tempter's intention and God's government

Aquinas treats demonic assault by distinguishing the evil intention from the providential government under which the act occurs. In article 1 malice belongs to the demons, who seek to obstruct human salvation. God does not share that intention. He permits evil and orders its consequences to good. Where Scripture describes an evil spirit as sent in punishment, the justice of the judgment and the spirit's hatred remain different intentions. God's governance does not make him the author of the temptation's wickedness. Aquinas sets divine grace first, and angelic protection second, in explaining why human weakness does not face spiritual enemies without help.¹⁵³

Article 2 begins with the meaning of tempting as testing. A trial can seek knowledge for a good purpose; the devil tests in order to discover and exploit a vulnerability. When God tests, the resulting disclosure is for creatures, not an addition to divine knowledge. Demons, by contrast, do need to learn. They observe outward conduct and infer inward dispositions, which only God knows directly. Their intelligence must not be confused with omniscience. Temptation can work through imagination and passion, but it cannot force the will's assent.¹⁵⁴

Article 3 denies that every sin follows a particular demonic suggestion. Human appetite and a defective free choice can account for a sinful act without such an intervention. Aquinas calls the devil an indirect cause in relation to the first temptation and the wounded condition inherited from that fall; this is different from being the direct instigator of each subsequent offense. His point preserves human responsibility. One cannot transfer one's voluntary act to a spiritual agent merely by noting that temptation exists.¹⁵⁵

Article 4 applies the strict distinction about miracles. No demon can act beyond the order of all created nature. Nevertheless a deceptive sign need not be an unreal event. It can be a real effect of created powers used to promote a false conclusion, or an appearance that misleads the senses. Aquinas's natural examples include the ancient theory of generation from putrefaction; that theory belongs to the explanatory natural philosophy of the text, not to the authority of the doctrinal distinction. What matters to the argument is the difference between arranging natural causes and creating or transcending them. He expressly denies that a demon can truly restore a dead person to life by its natural power.¹⁵⁶

Article 5 considers whether a defeated tempter can return. Aquinas reports opinions that defeat bars all further temptation, or bars further temptation of that person. He judges a temporary withdrawal from that person more probable, taking Luke 4:13 seriously: the withdrawal is for a time. The article offers no schedule and no guarantee of permanent immunity after a victory. Its conclusion combines God's merciful limit upon trial with the tempter's strategic retreat. The permission remains God's; neither success nor failure gives a demon independent jurisdiction.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵²ST I q. 113 a. 8.

¹⁵³ST I q. 114 a. 1, corpus and ad 1–2; compare Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 395.

¹⁵⁴ST I q. 114 a. 2, especially ad 2–3.

¹⁵⁵ST I q. 114 a. 3.

¹⁵⁶ST I q. 114 a. 4, corpus and ad 1–2; I q. 110 a. 4. For the causal distinction Aquinas receives, see Augustine, *De Trinitate* III.8.13–9.17.

¹⁵⁷ST I q. 114 a. 5.

Summa: I q. 114, aa. 1–5

Grade: Church teaching: Satan’s power is finite and permitted under providence, Catechism no. 395. Thomist position: the account of temptation and created powers. Disputed: the duration of withdrawal after defeat.

Authorities: Ephesians 6:12; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4:11; Luke 4:13. Aquinas also invokes *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, Augustine, Origen, Ambrose, and the anonymous *Opus imperfectum*.

Contrary opinion: Article 5 reports opinions excluding all further temptation, or further temptation of the same person; Aquinas judges temporary withdrawal more probable.

13 Christ, Mary, and the angels

13.1 One Head for the heavenly and earthly Church

The angels who minister to Jesus serve the incarnate Son. His assumption of human nature does not place him beneath them in the order of grace. Thomas asks the stronger question: is Christ *as man* their Head? His answer begins with a common end. Angels and human beings are called to the enjoyment of God; their different natures and offices belong to one community ordered toward that end. Christ possesses the fullness from which this community receives its life. The unity of its Head is therefore greater than the diversity of its members.¹⁵⁸

The objection from Hebrews 2:16 is substantial: the Word assumed human nature, not an angelic nature. Thomas does not answer by giving Christ a third nature. He answers that human souls and angels agree in intellectual life, although they differ specifically. Nor does the fact that angels already behold God remove them from Christ’s Church. The earthly Church lives by faith; the heavenly Church possesses the vision toward which faith journeys. Christ’s headship embraces both. His humanity acts in this spiritual order through its personal union with the Word. This is a claim about the one Christ and his gracious influence, not about a human creature exercising independent divine power.

Summa: III, q. 8, a. 4. **Grade:** Church teaching concerning Christ’s supremacy; Thomistic explanation of his headship according to his humanity. **Authorities:** Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:20–23; Matthew 4:11.

This headship gives angelic ministry its Christological direction. An angel does not provide a route to God that passes around the Son. The minister who announces his birth, strengthens him in his human suffering, or proclaims his resurrection serves the same Lord whose glory exceeds the minister’s own. Service does not imply that the Son lacks divine power. It displays the economy in which his true human life receives created assistance and his creatures participate in his work. The direction of Christian attention follows the direction of their service: toward Christ.

13.2 Gabriel and the Virgin’s consent

The Annunciation joins heavenly ministry to human freedom. In Thomas’s account, Mary hears and believes before she conceives; she becomes a conscious witness to the mystery accomplished in her. Her consent expresses the acceptance of human nature in its spiritual marriage with the Word. Predestination does not make that consent superfluous. God’s purpose includes the willing response of the person whom he prepares for it.¹⁵⁹

Gabriel’s embassy is fitting because God communicates divine things through angels, and because the restoration of humanity answers the earlier deception of the woman by the serpent. Yet the order of ministry is not an absolute ranking of the persons involved. Thomas says that Mary is above the angels in the dignity for which God chose her, while receiving angelic instruction as a wayfarer. A person may receive a service from someone whose ultimate dignity is lower than her own. The Annunciation therefore does not diminish Mary’s preeminence. It reveals the cooperation of gifts.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 4, corpus and ad 1–3; English Dominican translation, revised 1920, New Advent witness, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4008.htm>.

¹⁵⁹ *ST* III, q. 30, a. 1, corpus and ad 1–2; <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4030.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ *ST* III, q. 30, a. 2, corpus and ad 1. The argument is Thomas’s; the patristic quotations embedded in this article are not independently attributed here.

Thomas also resists the inference that the greatest embassy must have been carried by a seraph. Gabriel is an archangel; Thomas considers it credible that he is the highest of the archangels, without making him a member of the highest order. This is a theological judgment about the fittingness of his office.¹⁶¹

The bodily appearance of the messenger belongs to the mystery's embodied character. An invisible minister becomes visible to announce that the invisible God will take flesh. Mary receives illumination of mind together with an encounter accessible to her senses. Thomas consequently does not identify seeing Gabriel's assumed appearance with seeing the angelic essence. The message proceeds from salutation to instruction and then to consent; Mary's question seeks the manner of the promised conception, rather than refusing belief.¹⁶²

Summa: III, q. 30, aa. 1–4. **Grade:** Church teaching concerning the Annunciation and Mary's free consent; Thomistic arguments for the fittingness of its manner. **Authorities:** Luke 1:26–38; the article's received Dionysian and patristic authorities. **Contrary opinion:** Gabriel's membership in the highest order is reported and rejected in a. 2, ad 4.

13.3 Mary above the angels

Vatican II teaches that the grace of divine motherhood places Mary above all other creatures and explicitly describes her exaltation above angels and human beings. It also identifies her as redeemed through her Son, a member of the Church, and the Lord's handmaid. Her queenship is received from him; her veneration differs essentially from the adoration offered to God. These affirmations belong together. Mary's eminence is the triumph of grace in a creature, never a second divine sovereignty.¹⁶³

The distinction between nature and grace becomes especially clear here. Being human does not become being angelic through sanctification. Mary remains the mother who gave the Word his human flesh. The height of a created nature does not measure all that God may give through union with Christ. Angelic excellence and Marian preeminence can therefore be affirmed without confusion: one concerns the kind of creature, the other the singular gift and vocation bestowed upon her.

14 Disputed questions and the Byzantine witness

14.1 Bonaventure: composition without a body

Bonaventure and Thomas agree that an angel is a creature, intellectually alive, free, and incorporeal. They disagree over whether its created substance is composed of matter and form. Bonaventure's question concerns the principles that make a finite spirit a recipient of perfection. Mutability, receptivity, individuality, and limitation seem to him to require an actual and a potential principle within its essence. He therefore judges composition from matter and form the truer account.¹⁶⁴

His use of *matter* cannot simply be replaced with *body*. At the opening of the next question he explicitly takes the term broadly for a potential principle entering into a thing's constitution. This allows him to speak of spiritual matter without giving angels weight, bodily organs, or quantitative extension. In the *Breviloquium*, he accordingly calls the angelic substance simple, spiritual, and incorporeal, lacking quantitative dimensions. These descriptions do not retract his account of composition: they concern a different kind of simplicity.¹⁶⁵

Thomas rejects matter in an intellectual substance because intellectual reception differs from material reception. Matter receives a form by becoming the kind of thing that form determines; an intellect can know many forms without

¹⁶¹ST III, q. 30, a. 2, ad 4.

¹⁶²ST III, q. 30, aa. 3–4, especially a. 3, corpus and ad 1, and a. 4, corpus and ad 2.

¹⁶³Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), nn. 53, 56, 59, 66; official English text, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

¹⁶⁴Bonaventure, *In II Sententiarum*, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, response; *Opera omnia*, vol. 2 (Quaracchi, 1885), pp. 90–91; <https://archive.org/details/doctorisseraphic02bona/page/90/mode/2up>.

¹⁶⁵Bonaventure, *In II Sententiarum*, d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, opening statement, *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 94; *Breviloquium*, II.6, especially the explanation of the angelic substance's simplicity; Latin text, <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Medieval-OR/BonaventuraSBreviloquium.00000158.1a.html&chunk.id=00000039>.

successively becoming the physical things it knows. But Thomas does not therefore make an angel pure actuality. Its essence receives existence; its finite being depends upon God. Both theologians defend the creature's dependence. Their disagreement concerns whether that dependence and capacity require matter within the spiritual substance.¹⁶⁶

Their two accounts articulate the same fundamental distance from divine simplicity through different metaphysical principles. For Bonaventure, created receptivity reaches into the angel's substantial constitution as matter and form. For Thomas, the subsistent form itself receives existence. The angel's immateriality therefore magnifies the goodness of its Creator without erasing the difference between having being and being its source.

14.2 John of Damascus: created light and finite presence

John of Damascus describes angels as intelligent beings created through the Word and perfected through the Spirit. Their life is received; their illumination comes from God. His declaration that only God is absolutely immaterial places even the highest spirit at an immeasurable distance from the Creator. He nevertheless denies bodily dimensions to angels. Their incorporeality does not give them divine omnipresence: their activity is limited to the place of their commission. Their visible manifestations accommodate human perception rather than exposing their essence.¹⁶⁷

This language should not be turned into an identity with either later scholastic account. John does not formulate Bonaventure's question about spiritual matter. He also leaves undecided whether angels share one essence or differ in essence. Thomas, by contrast, determines that distinct immaterial angels differ specifically. John's reserve and Thomas's argument are different answers to how far the theologian can describe created intellectual diversity.¹⁶⁸

Their disagreement about creation is still more explicit. John prefers the creation of the intellectual world before the visible world, following Gregory the Theologian. Thomas regards simultaneous creation as more probable: angels and bodies are parts of one ordered universe. He expressly declines to condemn the contrary view, acknowledging the authority of Gregory. Angelic creation from nothing is the doctrinal ground; its priority relative to bodily creation remains **disputed**.¹⁶⁹

The same Byzantine witness makes the fall an act of freedom, not a defect planted in nature by its Maker. The first rebel was created good and departed from that goodness. God's permission bounds the demons' activity; they do not acquire the Creator's knowledge of the future. Here John's account supports the distinction between a spirit's natural gifts and its moral condition. Intelligence can remain while its exercise becomes hostile to its proper end.¹⁷⁰

14.3 The first sin: pride, envy, and the object desired

Augustine places the angels' happiness in their enjoyment of the unchangeable good and their certain possession of it forever. The devil's rebellion turns from that participation toward a private lordship. Such a lordship cannot escape the dominion of the Almighty: the creature's proud claim contradicts its actual dependence. The evil lies in the will that abandons truth, while the angelic nature remains the work of God. Augustine's reading of the devil as a sinner "from the beginning" consequently does not make evil his created essence. It identifies the beginning of his sin with the pride through which he departed from the good.¹⁷¹

Thomas argues that an intellectual creature's first disorder must be pride: a spiritual good is desired without the subjection owed to God's rule. Envy follows when another creature's good appears to threaten the singular excellence the rebel seeks. Desire for equality with God cannot mean a reasoned expectation of becoming the divine essence. Thomas locates the disorder instead in seeking beatitude through one's own power or according to one's own measure.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ *ST* I, q. 50, a. 2, corpus and ad 2–4; <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1050.htm>.

¹⁶⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II.3, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 9, New Advent witness, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33042.htm>.

¹⁶⁸ John of Damascus, *Exposition*, II.3, paragraph beginning "Whether they are equals in essence"; *ST* I, q. 50, a. 4.

¹⁶⁹ John of Damascus, *Exposition*, II.3, final discussion of the time of creation; *ST* I, q. 61, a. 3, corpus and replies, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1061.htm>.

¹⁷⁰ John of Damascus, *Exposition*, II.4.

¹⁷¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XI.13–15, trans. Marcus Dods; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120111.htm>.

¹⁷² *ST* I, q. 63, aa. 2–3; <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1063.htm>.

Bonaventure's account gives this self-exaltation a closely related form. Lucifer presumes upon his own excellence and desires precedence over others. By resting in his private good he treats himself as his own first principle and final good. The angel cannot actually become either. The attempted ascent is therefore a fall, and subsequent hostility toward humanity expresses the disordered will.¹⁷³

The identity and original rank of the chief rebel remain a separate question. John places him over the earthly realm. Thomas allows that position without judging it contrary to faith, but finds it more probable that the highest angel fell: greater excellence could supply a greater occasion for pride, even though it also gave less natural inclination to sin. A greater gift can become the object of greater presumption. Neither account makes the gift itself evil.¹⁷⁴

In these accounts, the fall reveals the difference between possessing a gift and receiving it rightly. The angel's power and intelligence are good. Pride turns their possessor from thanksgiving to self-sufficiency; envy then opposes the good shared with another. Angelic holiness makes the opposite movement: the spirit receives its excellence from God and delights in the communication of divine goodness.

15 The angels in liturgy and devotion

15.1 The Roman celebrations

The Roman Missal of 1962 celebrates the dedication of Saint Michael the Archangel on 29 September as a first-class feast. Saint Gabriel has his own third-class feast on 24 March, and Saint Raphael on 24 October. The Holy Guardian Angels are celebrated on 2 October, also third class. These are the titles and ranks of this edition; the dedication title on 29 September belongs to the feast's liturgical identity.¹⁷⁵

The postconciliar General Roman Calendar joins Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael in the feast of 29 September and keeps the Guardian Angels on 2 October as an obligatory memorial. The *Ordo lectionum Missae*, second typical edition of 1981, appoints John 1:47–51 for the archangels: the angels ascend and descend upon the Son of Man. Its first reading offers Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 or Apocalypse 12:7–12a. For the Guardian Angels, Matthew 18:1–5, 10 is expressly the memorial's proper Gospel.¹⁷⁶

These selections place angelology within the history of salvation. The Gospel of the archangels directs attention toward Christ, the meeting of heaven and earth. The Guardian Angels' Gospel joins heavenly dignity to care for the little ones. The person who can be overlooked on earth is not negligible before God. Angelic ministry therefore deepens the Church's attention to human persons rather than competing with it.

The 1962 formularies give the three named archangels distinct scriptural settings. Gabriel's lesson is Daniel 9:21–26; Raphael's is Tobias 12:7–15. Michael's is Apocalypse 1:1–5. The common introit drawn from Psalm 102:20 [Hebrew 103:20] places their particular missions within the obedience and praise of all the heavenly ministers. A feast's focus on one angel does not detach him from the common worship of God.¹⁷⁷

15.2 The Byzantine synaxis

The Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Cantor Institute of the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh publishes a Menaion office for 8 November under the title of the Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Michael and all the Angelic Powers. Its calendar marks a feast with an All-night Vigil. The celebration assembles the heavenly hosts around the same ministry of

¹⁷³Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, II.7, opening and explanatory paragraphs; Latin text, <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Medieval-OR/BonaventuraSBreviloquium.00000158.1a.html&chunk.id=00000041>.

¹⁷⁴John of Damascus, *Exposition*, II.4; *ST I*, q. 63, a. 7.

¹⁷⁵*Missale Romanum*, editio typica (Vatican, 1962), pp. 493, 670, 672, 695; CMAA facsimile, PDF pp. 574, 751, 753, 776, <https://media.churchmusicassociation.org/pdf/missale62.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶*Ordo lectionum Missae*, editio typica altera (Vatican, 1981), nn. 647 and 650, pp. 308–309, PDF pp. 362–363; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, n. 215, for the postconciliar Roman celebrations.

¹⁷⁷*Missale Romanum* (1962), pp. 493, 670, 695. Biblical assignments and themes are reported here; the missal's liturgical texts are not reproduced.

praise and protection that the name *bodiless powers* expresses. This is the calendar and usage witnessed by that particular Byzantine Catholic source.¹⁷⁸

The Latin ranks first class, third class, feast, and memorial do not supply a scale for this Byzantine celebration. Each belongs to its own liturgical ordering. The common theological subject is nevertheless clear: the heavenly ministers stand before God and serve his people. The celebration is corporate as well as personal. Michael's prominence gathers attention to the angelic host rather than making that host disappear behind a single protecting figure.

15.3 Prayer within Christ's worship

The Church's worship joins earthly voices to heavenly praise. The *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* recalls the Sanctus, angelic intercession, protection through the night, and the commendation of the dying. It describes angelic devotion as gratitude to God, reverence, and confidence in providence.¹⁷⁹

The connection between worship and ministry is especially strong in Thomas. Angels do not have to relinquish their possession of God in order to help human beings. Their service proceeds from the order of divine providence. For the worshipper, this makes gratitude more exact: God is thanked for a created friend and minister whose excellence belongs to God's gift. The minister may be honored and his intercession sought without being treated as the source of the grace requested.¹⁸⁰

15.4 Names and the discipline of devotion

The Directory's n. 217 directs that assigning names to angels be discouraged, except for Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, whose names occur in Scripture. It also rejects an account of the world that leaves people helpless between rival spiritual powers, and the habit of assigning every setback to a devil and every success to a guardian angel. Its positive alternative is moral commitment to the Gospel, humility, and prayer.¹⁸¹

The restriction gives devotion a determinate scriptural vocabulary. A Christian need not discover a guardian angel's private name to acknowledge his care. Nor does the absence of a supplied name make that ministry impersonal. In the theological account, an angel knows and wills; in the devotional act, the faithful person entrusts himself to the providence that sends this minister. Knowledge of an undisclosed name contributes nothing necessary to that relation.

Gratitude for protection also leaves room for suffering. The good that providence seeks is the person's journey to God; temporal ease is not its complete measure. A feast of the angels consequently teaches confidence without supplying a method for interpreting every accident. The angels' obedience directs the Christian toward his own obedience, and their praise invites him into the common worship whose center is Christ.

¹⁷⁸Metropolitan Cantor Institute, Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, online *Menaion*, 8 November, heading and feast symbol, accessed 29 September 2026, <https://mci.archpitt.org/menaion/11-08.html>. No service text is reproduced.

¹⁷⁹Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, nn. 213–216; decree dated 17 December 2001, official English web witness, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html.

¹⁸⁰*ST* I, q. 112, a. 1, corpus and ad 3–4; <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1112.htm>.

¹⁸¹*Directory*, n. 217. The wording is a curial pastoral directive about devotion, not a definition of the number of angels who possess personal identity.

A The nine orders compared

The names below follow the usual Latin-derived English terminology. Rank 1 is the highest. Dionysius presents the triads in CH VI–IX; Gregory gives his ascending sequence in *Homilies on the Gospels* XXXIV.7 and explains the offices in XXXIV.8–10. Aquinas compares the two arrangements in *ST* I q. 108 a. 6. The biblical passages attest the names; their ordered synthesis belongs to the patristic exposition.

Order	Latin	Dionysius	Gregory	Scriptural name
Seraphim	Seraphim	1	1	Isaiah 6:2, 6
Cherubim	Cherubim	2	2	Genesis 3:24; Ezekiel 10
Thrones	Throni	3	3	Colossians 1:16
Dominions	Dominationes	4	4	Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21
Virtues	Virtutes	5	7	Ephesians 1:21
Powers	Potestates	6	6	Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21
Principalities	Principatus	7	5	Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21
Archangels	Archangeli	8	8	Jude 9
Angels	Angeli	9	9	Luke 1:26; Hebrews 1:14

In Dionysius the highest triad is seraphim, cherubim, and thrones; the middle is dominions, virtues, and powers; the last is principalities, archangels, and angels. Gregory exchanges the relative places of principalities and virtues. Aquinas explains how each arrangement follows the offices assigned to its terms. He preserves the names and their differences while showing a substantial agreement in the ordering of divine contemplation, governance, and execution.

Order	Dionysian emphasis	Gregorian emphasis
Seraphim	Burning, purifying love; unceasing movement toward God (VII.1).	Incomparable ardor from nearness to the Creator (XXXIV.10).
Cherubim	Fullness of knowledge; contemplation and communication of wisdom (VII.1).	Fullness of knowledge through contemplation of divine glory (XXXIV.10).
Thrones	Stable receptivity and readiness to bear God (VII.1).	God exercises judgment through these seats of his presence (XXXIV.10).
Dominions	Freedom from servility; participation in divine lordship (VIII.1).	Eminent authority over subordinate ranks (XXXIV.10).
Virtues	Unwearied strength and readiness for divine action (VIII.1).	Ministers through whom signs and miracles are worked (XXXIV.10).
Powers	Ordered exercise of authority toward God (VIII.1).	Restraint of hostile spirits and their assaults (XXXIV.10).
Principalities	Godward leadership of subordinate ministers (IX.1).	Direction of good angels in the execution of divine ministries (XXXIV.10).
Archangels	Mediation between principalities and angels (IX.2).	Announcement of greater mysteries (XXXIV.8).
Angels	Completion of heavenly mediation toward humanity (IX.2).	Announcement of lesser matters; messenger as an office (XXXIV.8).

Parker's wording must be translated consistently between the two tables and his chapter VIII: *Lordships* means dominions (*kyriotetes*); *Powers* means virtues (*dynameis*); *Authorities* means powers (*exousiai*). The Latin *virtus* here signifies strength or power. It does not designate a separate company composed of moral habits. Common names can also designate a perfection shared by all angels; CH V and XI distinguish that use from the proper name of an order.

B The articles of the angelic treatise

The census follows all 118 articles in the twenty-four questions of the *Summa* treated here. Each row gives the question posed, Aquinas's determination and the principal authority or argument of the *sed contra*. The grade belongs to the stated determination.

B.1 Question 50

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether an Angel Is Altogether Incorporeal?	Angels are wholly incorporeal.	Church teaching. Psalm 103:4 [Hebrew 104:4]
2. Whether an Angel Is Composed of Matter and Form?	Angels have no matter-form composition, but retain essence-existence and potency-act composition.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names IV
3. Whether the Angels Exist in Any Great Number?	Angels form an immense multitude, exceeding material multitude in Aquinas's argument.	Thomist position. Daniel 7:10
4. Whether the Angels Differ in Species?	Each angel is specifically distinct; two angels cannot be individuals of one species.	Thomist position. Aristotle, Metaphysics III, and Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy X
5. Whether the Angels Are Incorruptible?	Angels are naturally incorruptible while remaining dependent on divine conservation.	Church teaching. Dionysius, Divine Names IV

B.2 Question 51

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Angels Have Bodies Naturally United to Them?	Angels have no bodies naturally united to them.	Church teaching. Dionysius, Divine Names IV
2. Whether Angels Assume Bodies?	Angels sometimes assume real bodies for manifestation to human beings.	Thomist position. Augustine, City of God XVI
3. Whether the Angels Exercise Functions of Life in the Bodies Assumed?	Assumed bodies exhibit external effects of living acts, but do not perform such acts as living organisms.	Thomist position. Prior conclusion: assumed bodies lack life

B.3 Question 52

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether an Angel Is in a Place?	An angel is present in a bodily place through application of its power, without dimensional containment.	Thomist position. Collect Visita, quaesumus: invocation of angels dwelling here

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
2. Whether an Angel Can Be in Several Places at Once?	An angel is present definitively in one operative place, which may be extended, not everywhere or in several places.	Thomist position. John Damascene, Orthodox Faith II.3
3. Whether Several Angels Can Be at the Same Time in the Same Place?	Two angels cannot be complete immediate operative causes of one and the same place in the same respect.	Thomist position. Analogy: two souls do not inform one body

B.4 Question 53

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether an Angel Can Be Moved Locally?	An angel can change local presence continuously or discontinuously through successive operative contacts.	Thomist position. Analogy with Christ's soul descending to the dead
2. Whether an Angel Passes Through Intermediate Space?	Continuous motion traverses intermediate places; discontinuous angelic motion need not.	Thomist position. Argument from a process preceding its achieved change; qualified in reply
3. Whether the Movement of an Angel Is Instantaneous?	Angelic movement includes before and after, measured by continuous or discontinuous time, not one indivisible instant.	Thomist position. Argument: movement has before and after

B.5 Question 54

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether an Angel's Act of Understanding Is His Substance?	A created angel's act of understanding is not its substance.	Thomist position. Only God's existence is identical with substance; operation is still more distinct
2. Whether in the Angel to Understand Is to Exist?	An angel's understanding is not its act of existence.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names IV: understanding as movement
3. Whether an Angel's Power of Intelligence Is His Essence?	An angel's intellectual power differs from its essence.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy XI: essence, power, operation
4. Whether There Is an Active and a Passive Intellect in an Angel?	Angels lack active and possible intellect in the human, abstraction-related sense.	Thomist position. Active/possible distinction relates to phantasms, absent in angels
5. Whether There Is Only Intellectual Knowledge in the Angels?	Angelic knowledge is intellectual; no organic sense or imagination belongs to an angel.	Thomist position. Gregory the Great, Gospel homily 29

B.6 Question 55

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Angels Know All Things by Their Substance?	Angels do not know everything through their own finite essence; other objects require species.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names IV
2. Whether the Angels Understand by Species Drawn from Things?	Angelic intelligible species are connatural gifts from God, not abstracted from objects.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names VII
3. Whether the Higher Angels Understand by More Universal Species Than the Lower Angels?	Higher angels know through fewer, more universal species, with more complete rather than vaguer cognition.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy XII; Book of Causes

B.7 Question 56

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether an Angel Knows Himself?	An angel understands itself through its own immaterial substance.	Thomist position. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis II
2. Whether One Angel Knows Another?	An angel knows another by an intelligible species, distinct from the other's natural subsistence.	Thomist position. Book of Causes: intelligences know incorruptible things
3. Whether an Angel Knows God by His Own Natural Principles?	Angels naturally know God through his image in their essence, not by seeing the divine essence.	Common teaching. Romans 1:19, with argument from angelic intellectual superiority

B.8 Question 57

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Angels Know Material Things?	Angels know material natures through connatural intelligible species.	Thomist position. A superior cognitive power includes what a lower can know
2. Whether an Angel Knows Singulars?	Angels know singulars and their individual conditions, necessary for their particular ministries.	Thomist position. Psalm 90:11 [Hebrew 91:11]
3. Whether Angels Know the Future?	Angels naturally know determined futures through causes and probable ones conjecturally; future contingents as actual require revelation.	Common teaching. Isaiah 41:23
4. Whether Angels Know Secret Thoughts?	Angels can infer thoughts from effects, but do not naturally know free thoughts and affections as interior acts.	Common teaching. Jeremiah 17:9–10

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
5. Whether the Angels Know the Mysteries of Grace?	Mysteries of grace are not naturally known; revelation discloses them unequally and successively.	Common teaching. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy VII, interpreting Isaiah 63:1

B.9 Question 58

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Angel's Intellect Is Sometimes in Potentiality, Sometimes in Act?	Natural species are already possessed, but consideration can be successive; revelation can supply new knowledge; beatific vision remains actual.	Thomist position. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis II
2. Whether an Angel Can Understand Many Things at the Same Time?	An angel simultaneously knows objects comprised under one species, not naturally all objects requiring different species.	Thomist position. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis IV.32
3. Whether an Angel's Knowledge Is Discursive?	Angelic natural knowing is nondiscursive: conclusions are apprehended in principles without discovery by reasoning.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names VII
4. Whether the Angels Understand by Composing and Dividing?	Angels know propositions without acquiring knowledge by composing and dividing.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names VII
5. Whether There Can Be Falsehood in the Intellect of an Angel?	Angels do not err about naturally known essences; demons can misjudge supernatural matters through disordered application.	Thomist position. Aristotle, De anima III; Augustine, Eighty-three Questions 32
6. Whether There Is a "Morning" and an "Evening" Knowledge in the Angels?	Morning and evening name knowledge of creatures in the Word and in their own existence.	Thomist position. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis IV.22,31; City of God as cited
7. Whether the Morning and Evening Knowledge Are One?	They differ in medium if evening uses connatural species; if both are through the Word they differ only by object-aspect.	Thomist position. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis IV.24

B.10 Question 59

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether There Is Will in the Angels?	Angels have will as intellectual appetite for good universally understood.	Church teaching. Augustine, Trinity X.11–12
2. Whether in the Angels the Will Differs from the Intellect?	Angelic will differs from both essence and intellect.	Thomist position. Will regards good; intellect also understands evil
3. Whether There Is Free-Will in the Angels?	Angels have free choice without requiring discursive deliberation.	Common teaching. Human freedom as dignity, more perfectly in angels

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
4. Whether There Is an Irascible and a Concupiscible Appetite in the Angels?	Angels have no concupiscible or irascible sensitive appetite; love and joy can name acts of will.	Thomist position. Aristotle, De anima III: those appetites belong to sensation

B.11 Question 60

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether There Is Natural Love or Dilection in an Angel?	Angels have a natural inclination of love in their intellectual will.	Thomist position. Augustine, Trinity X.1–2; love follows knowledge
2. Whether There Is Love of Choice in the Angels?	Angels have elective love grounded in natural love of the end.	Thomist position. Merit and demerit exceed merely natural acts
3. Whether the Angel Loves Himself with Both Natural Love, and Love of Choice?	Angels love themselves naturally and by chosen goods desired for themselves.	Thomist position. Aristotle, Ethics IX.8
4. Whether an Angel Loves Another with Natural Love As He Loves Himself?	Angels naturally love one another through shared nature, similarly but not equally to self-love.	Thomist position. Ecclesiasticus 13:19
5. Whether an angel by natural love loves God more than he loves himself?	Natural love orders an angel to God as universal good above its own private good; charity remains supernatural.	Thomist position. Moral precept to love God above self belongs to natural law

B.12 Question 61

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Angels Have a Cause of Their Existence?	Angels receive their entire existence from God.	Defined. Psalm 148:2,5
2. Whether the Angel Was Produced by God from Eternity?	Angels had a beginning and are not coeternal with God.	Defined. Proverbs 8:22
3. Whether the Angels Were Created Before the Corporeal World?	Simultaneous creation with bodies is judged more probable; prior angelic creation is not condemned.	Disputed. Genesis 1:1
4. Whether the Angels Were Created in the Empyrean Heaven?	Creation in the highest bodily heaven is fitting to angelic government, without bodily dependence.	Disputed. Strabus gloss on Genesis 1:1

B.13 Question 62

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Angels Were Created in Beatitude?	Angels begin with natural perfection, not consummated supernatural beatitude.	Thomist position. Their possible fall excludes initial confirmation in beatitude
2. Whether an Angel Needs Grace in Order to Turn to God?	Grace is needed to turn to God as supernatural beatitude.	Common teaching. Romans 6:23
3. Whether the Angels Were Created in Grace?	Creation in sanctifying grace is judged more probable, though opinions differ.	Disputed. Augustine, City of God XII.9
4. Whether an Angel Merits His Beatitude?	Angels merited beatitude by a grace-informed act preceding enjoyment.	Thomist position. Apocalypse 21:17: measure of man and angel
5. Whether the Angel Obtained Beatitude Immediately After One Act of Merit?	Beatitude followed one meritorious act immediately in the succession of angelic acts.	Thomist position. Analogy with a separated soul's unhindered entrance into beatitude
6. Whether the Angels Receive Grace and Glory According to the Degree of Their Natural Gifts?	Aquinas reasonably proposes grace and glory proportioned to angelic natural gifts.	Thomist position. Peter Lombard, Sentences II d.3
7. Whether Natural Knowledge and Love Remain in the Beatified Angels?	Natural knowledge and love remain in beatitude, ordered to higher knowledge and love.	Thomist position. Perfection preserves nature and its operations
8. Whether a Beatified Angel Can Sin?	The beatified angel cannot sin, because it sees God as goodness itself.	Common teaching. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis XI
9. Whether the Beatified Angels Advance in Beatitude?	Essential beatitude does not increase; joy concerning the salvation of others can increase until judgment.	Thomist position. Merit belongs to wayfarers, not possessors of the end

B.14 Question 63

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Evil of Fault Can Be in the Angels?	A created angel can sin by willing without conformity to God's rule.	Church teaching. Job 4:18
2. Whether Only the Sin of Pride and Envy Can Exist in an Angel?	The first angelic sin is pride; envy follows; demons incur guilt in other sins by inducing them.	Common teaching. Augustine, City of God XIV.3
3. Whether the Devil Desired to Be As God?	The devil sought self-sufficient final happiness or supernatural likeness by its own power, not literal equality of essence with God.	Thomist position. Isaiah 14:13-14; Questions on Old and New Testament 113, attributed to Augustine in the Summa
4. Whether Any Demons Are Naturally Wicked?	No demon is evil by nature; wickedness is voluntary.	Defined. Dionysius, Divine Names IV
5. Whether the Devil Was Wicked by the Fault of His Own Will in the First Instant of His Creation?	The devil did not sin in the first instant of creation; the initial operation comes from the good Creator.	Thomist position. Genesis 1:31

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
6. Whether There Was Any Interval Between the Creation and the Fall of the Angel?	Aquinas judges the fall immediately after the first instant more probable, given creation in grace and immediate reward.	Disputed. John 8:44, interpreted through Augustine, City of God XI.15
7. Whether the Highest Angel Among Those Who Sinned Was the Highest of All?	Aquinas favors the chief sinner's being the highest angel, while permitting the earthly-ruler view.	Disputed. Gregory the Great, Gospel homily 34
8. Whether the Sin of the Highest Angel Was the Cause of the Others Sinning?	The chief angel induced others to sin by exhortation, without coercing their choice.	Thomist position. Apocalypse 12:4
9. Whether Those Who Sinned Were As Many As Those Who Remained Firm?	More angels remained faithful than sinned; no exact numerical census is determined.	Thomist position. 4 Kings 6:16

B.15 Question 64

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the Demons' Intellect Is Darkened by Privation of the Knowledge of All Truth?	Demonic natural knowledge remains; revealed information is limited; loving supernatural wisdom is absent.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Divine Names IV
2. Whether the Will of the Demons Is Obstinate in Evil?	Demons are fixed in their chosen aversion, though still capable of choosing diverse means.	Church teaching. Psalm 73:23 [Hebrew 74:23]
3. Whether There Is Sorrow in the Demons?	Demons have sorrow as opposition of will to unwelcome realities, not bodily passion or repentance for fault as fault.	Thomist position. Apocalypse 18:7
4. Whether Our Atmosphere Is the Demons' Place of Punishment?	Hell is their due punishment; present permitted activity in the dark air does not suspend punishment.	Thomist position. Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis III.10

B.16 Question 106

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether one angel enlightens another?	One angel enlightens another by strengthening the recipient intellect and proportioning a communicated truth; God alone gives nature, grace, glory, and immediate vision of his essence.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy VIII
2. Whether one angel moves another angel's will?	An angel can persuade another through a presented good but cannot inwardly cause the act of willing.	Thomist position. Theological argument: only God bestows righteousness and inwardly changes the will
3. Whether an inferior angel can enlighten a superior angel?	Inferior angels do not illuminate superiors; the heavenly order differs from earthly ecclesiastical office.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy IV; Ecclesiastical Hierarchy V

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
4. Whether the superior angel enlightens the inferior as regards all he himself knows?	Superior angels communicate their gifts as far as recipients can receive them; unequal modes of understanding and new disclosures remain.	Thomist position. Gregory through Peter Lombard, Sentences II d.9; Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy XV

B.17 Question 107

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether one angel speaks to another?	An angel speaks by voluntarily directing a mental conception to another, without a bodily sign.	Thomist position. 1 Corinthians 13:1
2. Whether the inferior angel speaks to the superior?	Inferiors can speak to superiors; communication of a private intention is speech without illumination.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy VII (Psalm 23[24])
3. Whether an angel speaks to God?	Angels speak to God in praise, admiration, and consultation, not to supply knowledge he lacks.	Thomist position. Zacharias 1:12
4. Whether local distance influences the angelic speech?	Local distance does not obstruct angelic speech, which is an intellectual act.	Thomist position. Luke 16:24
5. Whether all the angels know what one speaks to another?	An angel may address one recipient without communicating the same conception to every angel.	Thomist position. Argument from the possibility of private human speech

B.18 Question 108

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether all the angels are of one hierarchy?	One divine ruler governs all; three angelic hierarchies are distinguished by modes of receiving illumination about divine works.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy VI
2. Whether there are several orders in one hierarchy?	Each hierarchy contains three orders distinguished by offices: beginning, middle, and completion.	Thomist position. Ephesians 1:20–21
3. Whether there are many angels in one order?	Many angels belong to an order under the general classification available to us; each has a more particular office.	Thomist position. Isaias 6:3
4. Whether the distinction of hierarchies and orders comes from the angelic nature?	Orders involve natural gifts and gracious gifts; supernatural fruition formally depends upon grace.	Thomist position. Peter Lombard, Sentences II d.9
5. Whether the orders of the angels are properly named?	Scriptural order names signify proper excellence; shared perfections are possessed properly, eminently, or by participation.	Thomist position. Scriptural names: Isaias 6; Ezechiel 1/10; Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21; Jude 9

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
6. Whether the grades of the orders are properly assigned?	Dionysius and Gregory exchange the ranks of Principalities and Virtues; both arrangements have intelligible functional explanations.	Disputed. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy VII–IX
7. Whether the orders will outlast the Day of Judgment?	Differences of nature and glory endure; missions leading pilgrims to their end cease in that form, while communion and illumination remain.	Thomist position. Judges 5:20, applied to angels
8. Whether men are taken up into the angelic orders?	Humans can attain angelic degrees of glory by grace without acquiring angelic nature.	Thomist position. Matthew 22:30

B.19 Question 109

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether there are orders among the demons?	Demons retain natural order; they lost initial grace and never possessed consummated glory.	Thomist position. Ephesians 6:12
2. Whether among the demons there is precedence?	Demonic precedence follows remaining natural inequalities; cooperation arises from shared malice rather than charity.	Thomist position. Gloss on 1 Corinthians 15:24
3. Whether there is enlightenment in the demons?	Demons communicate conceptions but do not illuminate one another by ordering truth to God.	Thomist position. Ecclesiasticus 34:4 and the account of illumination
4. Whether the good angels have precedence over the bad angels?	Good angels govern bad angels by participation in divine justice, even where a demon has greater natural powers.	Thomist position. Augustine, De Trinitate III.4.9 (received citation says II); Gregory, Homilies II.34.10

B.20 Question 110

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the corporeal creature is governed by the angels?	Bodily creatures are governed through angels within providence; distinctions of office do not require a choir per bodily species.	Thomist position. Augustine, De Trinitate III.4; Gregory, Dialogues IV.6
2. Whether corporeal matter obeys the mere will of an angel?	Matter does not take any substantial form by an angel's mere willing; angels arrange bodily agents.	Thomist position. Augustine, De Trinitate III.8.13 (locus supplied from direct reading)
3. Whether bodies obey the angels as regards local motion?	Angels can move bodies locally and thereby bring other bodily changes about through natural causes.	Thomist position. Augustine, De Trinitate III.8–9
4. Whether angels can work miracles?	God alone works miracles beyond the whole created order; angels intercede or minister rather than accomplish them by natural power.	Thomist position. Psalm 135:4 (Hebrew 136:4)

B.21 Question 111

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether an angel can enlighten man?	Angels strengthen human understanding and propose truth through sensible likenesses; infused faith remains God's gift.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy IV
2. Whether the angels can change the will of man?	Angels can persuade and affect passions but cannot inwardly cause or necessitate the human will's assent.	Thomist position. Proverbs 21:1
3. Whether an angel can change man's imagination?	Good and bad angels can change imagination through bodily conditions; they use material received through sense.	Thomist position. Matthew 1:20; 2:13,19
4. Whether an angel can change the human senses?	Angels can change sensation through external objects or internal bodily conditions.	Thomist position. Genesis 19:11; 4 Kings 6:18

B.22 Question 112

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether the angels are sent on works of ministry?	Angels are sent by divine command to apply their limited power in ministry, without losing contemplation or dignity.	Church teaching. Exodus 23:20
2. Whether all the angels are sent in ministry?	The higher orders are never sent on direct external missions, although all communicate intellectual effects.	Disputed. Gregory, Homilies II.34, reporting Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy XIII
3. Whether all the angels who are sent, assist?	All blessed angels assist by seeing God directly; only the highest hierarchy assists in the narrower sense of receiving divine mysteries immediately.	Thomist position. Gregory, Moralia XVII on Job 25:3
4. Whether all the angels of the second hierarchy are sent?	Five orders execute external ministry; Dominations direct it, while the first three orders and Dominations do not execute external missions.	Thomist position. Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy VIII

B.23 Question 113

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether men are guarded by the angels?	Angels guard fallible human persons by helping practical understanding; their help neither replaces grace nor forces consent.	Church teaching. Psalm 90:11 (Hebrew 91:11)
2. Whether each man is guarded by an angel?	An individual guardian is assigned to each human person because providence concerns the enduring individual rational soul.	Thomist position. Jerome, Commentary on Matthew III, at 18:10, cited by Aquinas
3. Whether to guard men belongs only to the lowest order of angels?	Personal guardians belong to the lowest order; broader guardianships extend through higher orders.	Thomist position. Psalm 90 (Hebrew 91); Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy V, IX

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
4. Whether angels are appointed to the guardianship of all men?	Every human wayfarer receives angelic protection, including unbelievers; Christ has ministering angels rather than a superior guardian.	Church teaching. Jerome, Commentary on Matthew III, at 18:10, cited by Aquinas
5. Whether an angel is appointed to guard a man from his birth?	Personal guardianship begins at birth rather than baptism; maternal guardianship of the unborn is offered as probable.	Thomist position. Jerome, Commentary on Matthew III, at 18:10, cited by Aquinas
6. Whether the angel guardian ever forsakes a man?	A guardian never abandons a person entirely, though providence can permit particular harms or sins.	Thomist position. 1 Peter 5:8, a fortiori argument for unceasing good guardianship
7. Whether angels grieve for the ills of those whom they guard?	Blessed angels do not suffer grief; they reject sin while adhering to divine justice and permission.	Thomist position. Apocalypse 21:4
8. Whether there can be strife or discord among the angels?	Resistance among good angels concerns opposed matters presented for divine judgment, not contrary wills.	Thomist position. Daniel 10:13

B.24 Question 114

Article and question	Aquinas's determination	Grade; authority
1. Whether men are assailed by the demons?	Demonic malice causes the assault; its permission and ordering toward good belong to divine providence.	Church teaching. Ephesians 6:12
2. Whether to tempt is proper to the devil?	To tempt is to test; demons test to harm and infer inward dispositions from effects rather than knowing hearts directly.	Thomist position. 1 Thessalonians 3:5 and its gloss
3. Whether all sins are due to the temptation of the devil?	Not every sin is directly instigated by a demon; the devil is an indirect cause through the first temptation and its consequences.	Thomist position. De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus 49 (received numbering)
4. Whether demons can lead men astray by means of real miracles?	Demons cannot work miracles strictly understood; real natural effects and deceptive appearances can nevertheless mislead.	Thomist position. Augustinian attribution; English edition marks Liber XXI sententiarum 4 as supposititious
5. Whether a demon who is overcome by man, is for this reason hindered from making further assaults?	Temporary withdrawal after defeat is more probable than permanent exclusion; the tempter may return with permission.	Disputed. Matthew 4:11

C Parallel treatments in Aquinas

The following loci develop the distinctions used in the systematic exposition. The *Summa*'s connected account supplies the sequence; the other works make particular arguments more explicit.

Work and locus	Related <i>Summa</i> loci	Contribution
<i>De ente et essentia</i> , the discussion beginning <i>Nunc restat videre</i> and its sequel <i>His igitur visis</i>	I q. 50 a. 2 ad 3	Separate substances lack matter while retaining the reception of existence. The Baur–Koch/Corpus Thomisticum witness numbers these chapters 3–4; other editions divide the work differently.
<i>De veritate</i> , q. 8	I qq. 54–58	Angelic knowledge: its modes, objects and limits; the relation of natural intellect to the vision of God.
<i>De veritate</i> , q. 9 aa. 1–4	I qq. 106–107	Illumination, purification and perfection as the communication and reception of knowledge; speech as voluntary disclosure.
<i>De malo</i> , q. 16	I qq. 63–64, 109, 114	The demons’ nature, sin, persistence in evil, knowledge and activity. The question develops the relation between enduring natural goods and the evil of the will.
<i>Summa</i> , III q. 8 a. 4	I q. 108 a. 8	Christ as head of angels and human beings within one mystical body, with distinct ways of receiving his gifts.
<i>Summa</i> , III q. 30 aa. 1–4	I q. 51 a. 2; q. 108 a. 5; q. 112 a. 1	The Annunciation: the messenger, Mary’s consent, Gabriel’s commission, the bodily appearance and the order of the message.

The parallel texts clarify the same underlying relation: the creature’s highest perfection is received. The act of being, intelligible truth, supernatural beatitude and a ministry to another each require their proper account; none is explained merely by calling the recipient immaterial.

C.1 The shared light in *De veritate*

The earlier disputation makes the recipient’s activity especially clear. A teacher offers a principle through which the pupil can understand something previously beyond his grasp. Angelic illumination accomplishes this without vocal sounds or successive reasoning: one intellect communicates truth according to another’s capacity. The lower angel receives a real perfection and truly understands. The higher angel neither creates that intellect nor bestows its beatitude.¹⁸²

Purification, illumination and perfection name distinguishable moments in the reception of intelligible truth. Purification removes ignorance; illumination supplies the means of knowing; perfection is the knowledge attained. A blessed angel can thus receive a new particular revelation while already enjoying God. Holiness is compatible with receptivity to further gifts.¹⁸³

Speech expresses the will to share. An angel’s nature can be known without every actual thought becoming public. The speaker directs a conception to another, distinguishing possession of an intelligible form, actual consideration, and communication. This willing disclosure gives spiritual communion a personal form: understanding is shared by distinct knowers who address one another.¹⁸⁴

D A selected Dionysian–Thomistic concordance

This concordance records passages used in the exposition. “Express” means that the *Summa* names Dionysius and the relevant chapter; “parallel” marks a comparison of arguments. An objection is identified as an objection and must

¹⁸²*De veritate*, q. 9 a. 1, corpus and ad 2–4, 9–10, 13, 16; Latin Leonine-aligned electronic witness, Corpus Thomisticum.

¹⁸³*De veritate*, q. 9 a. 3, corpus and ad 1–5.

¹⁸⁴*De veritate*, q. 9 a. 4, corpus and ad 7–9, 11, 15.

be read with its reply. The table is a reading guide, not a count of all Dionysian citations in Aquinas. Parker page ranges refer to the 1899 part II; PG 3 ranges identify the original chapter text, excluding subsequent commentary where possible.

CH	Parker / PG 3	<i>Summa theologiae</i>	Reception or qualification
I	1–4 / 119–124	I q. 111 a. 1, body	Express: human illumination through sensible likenesses.
II	4–13 / 135–146	I q. 1 a. 9 ad 3	Dissimilar symbols protect against literalism. The received English reference prints CH I; the developed source argument is II.
III	13–16 / 163–168	I q. 108 a. 1, objection 2 and body; q. 106 a. 2 ad 1	Express hierarchy definition; divine Persons do not undergo purification. Angelic purification can remove ignorance without sin.
IV	16–21 / 177–182	I q. 111 a. 1, sed contra; q. 106 a. 3, sed contra	Express: angelic mediation and orderly illumination.
V	21–22 / 195–196	I q. 108 a. 5, body and ad 1	Parallel: common names and proper perfections, distinguished by participation and eminence.
VI	23–24 / 199–202	I q. 108 a. 1, sed contra; a. 2, body; a. 3, body	Express triads; our general distinctions do not exhaust each angel's particular rank.
VII	24–31 / 205–212	I q. 108 a. 5 ad 5–6; q. 106 a. 1; q. 107 a. 2, sed contra	Express names, illumination, and questions addressed upward. All blessed angels see God's essence immediately.
VIII	31–35 / 237–242	I q. 106 a. 1, sed contra; q. 108 a. 5 ad 1–3	Express communication of light and explanation of the middle orders.
IX	35–40 / 257–262	I q. 108 a. 5 ad 3–4; q. 113 a. 3	Express names; comparison with the distinction between corporate and individual guardianship.
X	41–42 / 271–274	I q. 108 a. 3 ad 1	Express: first, middle, and last within the same order.
XI	42–44 / 283–286	I q. 54 a. 3, sed contra; q. 108 a. 5 ad 1	Express: essence, power, and operation; common and special senses of power.
XII	44–45 / 291–294	I q. 55 a. 3, sed contra; q. 106 a. 4, objection 1 and reply	Express: more universal knowledge; differing reception without a superior's withholding illumination.
XIII	46–53 / 299–308	I q. 112 a. 2, body and ad 2	Express: Isaiah's minister explained by shared office or mediated agency.
XIV	53–54 / 321–322	I q. 50 a. 3, body; q. 112 a. 4 ad 2	Express multitude; interpretation of those who stand before God and those who minister.
XV	54–66 / 325–340	I q. 106 a. 1, body; q. 107 a. 5, objection 3 and reply	Express: teeth as the adaptation of intellectual nourishment; shared illumination and particular speech.

CH V and XIV have no numbered subdivisions in Parker. Chapter VI is also printed without section headings there, whereas PG 3 marks sections 1–2. Those differences concern the editions' navigation. They do not supply additional chapters or alter the order of the argument.

E Magisterial chronology

The acts below establish different kinds of claims. The medieval councils' confession of creation, modern doctrinal exposition, and the regulation of devotion have their own objects and authority.

Date	Act and locus	Teaching relevant to the angels
1215	Lateran IV, <i>Firmiter credimus</i> , DS 800–801	One Creator of spiritual and corporeal creatures; demons created good, becoming evil through their own action; perpetual punishment with the devil. Defined.
24 April 1870	Vatican I, <i>Dei Filius</i> , ch. 1 and Creator canons 1–5	Free creation from nothing; God's substance distinct from created spiritual and bodily things; all creation governed by providence. Defined.
12 August 1950	Pius XII, <i>Humani generis</i> , no. 26	Rejection of doubts about angelic personality and the essential distinction of matter and spirit; defense of the gratuity of supernatural calling. Church teaching.
1992; Latin typical edition 1997	<i>Catechism</i> , 328–336, 391–395	Personal spiritual creatures, their service of Christ and the Church, the free angelic fall and the limits of Satan's power. Church teaching.
17 December 2001 decree	Congregation for Divine Worship, <i>Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy</i> , 213–217	Angelic devotion ordered to the Church's faith and worship; restriction of the discouragement of assigning other names than Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Church teaching and devotional discipline.

The dating of the *Catechism* identifies the promulgated work and its typical edition; the English wording consulted is the Holy See's web witness accessed on 29 September 2026. The Directory's final entry concerns ecclesiastical direction of devotion; it does not constitute a new definition of angelic nature.

F Calendar and scriptural names

The Roman entries describe the general calendars of the identified books. Occurrence and local calendars can alter a celebration in a particular year or place. The Byzantine entry belongs to the Pittsburgh Menaion witness.

Date	Celebration	Calendar and rank
24 March	Saint Gabriel the Archangel	Roman Missal 1962: III class
29 September	Dedication of Saint Michael the Archangel	Roman Missal 1962: I class
2 October	Holy Guardian Angels	Roman Missal 1962: III class
24 October	Saint Raphael the Archangel	Roman Missal 1962: III class
29 September	Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael	Postconciliar General Roman Calendar: feast
2 October	Holy Guardian Angels	Postconciliar General Roman Calendar: obligatory memorial
8 November	Synaxis of Michael and all the Angelic Powers	Pittsburgh Byzantine Catholic Menaion: feast with All-night Vigil

Witnesses: *Missale Romanum* (1962), pp. 493, 670, 672, 695; *Ordo lectionum Missae* (1981), nn. 647, 650, pp. 308–309; *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, n. 215; Metropolitan Cantor Institute, *Menaion*, 8 November.

Name	Principal scriptural loci	Ministry disclosed
Michael	Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Apocalypse 12:7–9	Defense of God’s people; combat against the dragon
Gabriel	Daniel 8:16; 9:21–23; Luke 1:19, 26–38	Interpretation and announcement; the Annunciation
Raphael	Tobias 3:25; 12:14–15, in the Vulgate numbering	Healing, deliverance, and companionship

The Directory, n. 217, exempts these three scriptural names from its direction discouraging the assignment of names to angels. The list does not identify a Christian’s particular guardian angel. Nor does it identify all seven angels mentioned in Tobias 12:15. The distinction is between what Scripture names and what devotion is permitted to supply on its own.

G Scriptural loci and their theological use

The table groups the principal passages developed in the body. It is an index of this study’s exposition, not an inventory of every biblical appearance of an angel. Psalm numbers follow the Vulgate, with the Hebrew number in brackets.

Locus	Subject in the study
Genesis 3:24	Cherubim and the guarded way to life; the names of the orders.
Genesis 18:1–15; 19:1–3	Divine visitation, hospitality and assumed bodies.
Genesis 28:10–17	Jacob’s ladder; angels and God’s covenant promise.
Exodus 23:20–23	The angel’s mission and the authority of the sender.
Tobias 12:12–22	Raphael, intercession, healing and the return to praise of God.
Psalms 90:11–12 [91]; 102:20–22 [103]	Guardianship, obedience and service.
Psalms 148:1–5	Heavenly praise and the angels’ created existence.
Isaias 6:1–8	Seraphim, the burning coal, purification and mission; Dionysius’s difficult case in chapter XIII.
Daniel 7:9–10	The innumerable court; distinction between standing before God and ministering.
Daniel 10:12–21; 12:1–3	Michael, the princes of peoples, providential government and human resurrection.
Matthew 18:10	The little ones and their angels; guardianship and vision of the Father.
Matthew 22:29–32	Risen humanity compared to angels concerning marriage; human resurrection remains human.
Luke 1:19–38; 2:8–15	Gabriel, the Annunciation and the heavenly praise at Christ’s birth.
Luke 24:1–8	The messengers at the tomb and the announcement of the Resurrection.
Colossians 1:15–20; 2:18–19	Invisible powers created through Christ; the primacy of the head over every ministry.
Hebrews 1:1–14	The Son adored by angels; ministering spirits.
Hebrews 12:22–24	The heavenly assembly of angels and perfected human spirits around the mediator.
Apocalypse 12:7–12	Michael’s battle, the accuser’s defeat and the Lamb’s victory.
Apocalypse 19:9–10; 22:8–9	The angel as fellow servant; adoration directed to God.

H Demonic action and its limits in Aquinas

These distinctions summarize the determinations expounded in the treatise. They concern the kinds of action Aquinas attributes to fallen spirits, not the identification of a cause in any particular human experience.

Subject	Determination and limit	Governing locus
Natural intelligence	Natural cognition remains; charity and the blessed vision do not follow from it.	I q. 64 a. 1
The will	The fallen will is fixed in its evil end; its natural powers do not thereby become infinite.	I q. 64 a. 2
Suffering	Sorrow concerns a will thwarted in its objects, not the passions of a mortal body.	I q. 64 a. 3
Order	Natural superiority and subordination can remain among demons; their concord in evil is not charity.	I q. 109 aa. 1–2
Illumination	Their communication is not the holy illumination treated under the good angels.	I q. 109 a. 3
Subjection	Evil spirits remain subject to the ordering exercised by good angels under God.	I q. 109 a. 4
Material effects	Angels move bodies and employ bodily causes; matter does not receive a substantial form by an angel's mere will.	I q. 110 aa. 2–3
Miracles	A marvel exceeding familiar human power need not exceed all created power. A miracle strictly so called is God's work.	I q. 110 a. 4; q. 114 a. 4
Human will	A spirit can persuade and stir passions; it cannot inwardly cause or necessitate a person's consent.	I q. 111 a. 2
Imagination and sense	Created spiritual agency can affect bodily conditions of imagination and sensation; this does not imply access to every secret thought.	I q. 111 aa. 3–4; q. 57 a. 4
Temptation	The devil tempts toward sin, but not every sin results from a present demonic suggestion.	I q. 114 aa. 2–3
Providence	Permission of trial and the tempter's evil intention are distinct; the good intended by God does not make the temptation good.	I q. 114 a. 1
Resistance	Aquinas describes restraint following resistance; he does not promise that a person can never be tempted again.	I q. 114 a. 5

The theological account of evil is accompanied by the Church's confession that the devil remains a creature (*Catechism*, 395). The history, rite and discipline of exorcism receive their separate treatment in Triptych's *Catholic Exorcism: History and Current Practice*.

I Witnesses concerning the first angelic sin

Witness and locus	Determination	Question left distinct
Augustine, <i>City of God</i> XI.13–15	The devil's nature was God's good work; his abandonment of truth belongs to his will. Pride explains the refusal of rightful subjection.	The account of the angels' original condition and the timing of their assurance of perseverance.

Witness and locus	Determination	Question left distinct
John of Damascus, <i>Exposition</i> II.4	A good angel assigned to the earthly realm voluntarily rebelled; other angels followed him.	This assignment does not establish Thomas's preferred account of the rebel's original rank.
Bonaventure, <i>Breviloquium</i> II.7	Lucifer presumptuously rested in his private excellence and sought superiority over others; hatred and envy toward humanity follow the fall.	Created excellence itself remains a good, distinct from its proud appropriation.
Thomas, <i>ST</i> I, q. 63, aa. 2–3	Pride is the first sin; envy follows. The rebel desires likeness to God through an inordinate mode of attaining beatitude.	Desire for divine likeness does not mean believing that a creature could become God by nature.
Thomas, <i>ST</i> I, q. 63, a. 7	The highest angel's fall is judged more probable; the Damascene account is not rejected as contrary to faith.	The chief rebel's rank is an opinion distinct from the doctrine of the voluntary fall.

Sources: Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, book XI, chapters 13–15, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120111.htm>; the Damascene, Bonaventure, and Thomas witnesses are identified in the preceding chapters. The will's rejection of God and its ensuing envy stand in a logical sequence: envy proceeds from the proud attachment to a private good.

J Terminology

English	Source term	Meaning in this treatise
Angel	Latin <i>angelus</i> ; Greek <i>angelos</i>	A messenger; also the customary general name of the spiritual creatures and the particular name of the lowest order. The context distinguishes these uses.
Spirit	<i>spiritus</i> ; <i>pneuma</i>	A spiritual being. In angelology the term denotes a created personal subject, not an impersonal force.
Intellect	<i>intellectus</i> ; <i>nous</i>	The power of understanding. Angelic intellect has no bodily organ and does not abstract from sensory images.
Will	<i>voluntas</i>	Intellectual appetite: inclination toward the good apprehended by intellect.
Substance	<i>substantia</i> ; <i>ousia</i>	That which subsists, as distinct from a quality or operation inhering in a subject.
Essence	<i>essentia</i>	What a thing is. In a created angel essence receives existence; it is not the unreceived divine act of being.
Existence	<i>esse</i>	The act of being. Aquinas's angelic immateriality retains the composition of essence and received existence.
Act and potency	<i>actus</i> , <i>potentia</i>	Actuality and capacity for actuality. A creature without matter can still stand in potency to received perfection.
Species	<i>species</i>	Either a metaphysical kind or an intelligible likeness by which something is known. The latter does not name a second angelic creature within the knower.
Natural knowledge	<i>cognitio naturalis</i>	Knowledge proportioned to the created intellect and its connatural forms.
Beatific vision	<i>visio Dei per essentiam</i>	Seeing God's essence, made possible by divine elevation. It exceeds every created natural power.

English	Source term	Meaning in this treatise
Morning/evening knowledge	<i>cognitio matutina/vespertina</i>	Augustine's and Aquinas's distinction between knowing creatures in the Word and in their created being; not hours on an angelic clock.
Illumination	<i>illuminatio</i>	Communication of intelligible truth proportioned to a recipient, with strengthening of that intellect.
Speech	<i>locutio</i>	A will's directing its mental conception to another angel; broader than illumination and independent of vocal sound.
Hierarchy	<i>hierarchia</i>	Sacred order, knowledge and activity directed toward likeness to God; in the nine-order arrangement, a triad.
Order	<i>ordo; taxis</i>	A rank within ordered spiritual communion, distinguished through gifts and ministries.
Purification	<i>purgatio; katharsis</i>	In blessed angels, release from a lack of knowledge or a lesser participation, not cleansing from moral fault. Context governs Dionysius's analogical use.
Perfection	<i>perfectio; teleiosis</i>	Fulfillment in the participation and activity proper to a creature.
Definitive presence	<i>definitive</i>	An angel's finite operative presence, without the dimensional extension by which bodies occupy place.
Mission	<i>missio</i>	Ministry proceeding under God's command toward another creature; consistent with the blessed vision.
Assumed body	<i>corpus assumptum</i>	A bodily instrument of appearance and action, distinct from the natural body animated by a human soul.
Dominion; domination	<i>Dominatio; kyriotes</i>	The same order under customary English alternatives.
Virtue/Power	<i>Virtus; dynamis</i>	"Virtues" in the Latin order names; Parker's "Powers." Here <i>virtus</i> denotes strength or power rather than a moral habit.
Power/Authority	<i>Potestas; exousia</i>	"Powers" in the Latin order names; Parker's "Authorities."
Principality	<i>Principatus; arche</i>	The order Parker calls "Principalities"; its rank differs between the Dionysian and Gregorian lists.

The principal controls are Augustine, *City of God* XI.9, 29; Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* XVI; Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* III, VI–IX; John Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* II.3; and Aquinas, *ST* I qq. 50–60, 106–108, 112. The paired order names retain the distinction between a translated word and a rank in a particular witness's arrangement.

K Witness register

Witness	Work used	Contribution to the account
Sacred Scripture	Douay–Rheims/Challoner witness	The angels' creation, worship, personal ministry, service of Christ and participation in judgment.
Basil of Caesarea	<i>On the Holy Spirit</i> , XVI	The heavenly powers' holiness received through the Spirit.
Gregory Nazianzen	Oration 38.9	The first intellectual creation and the goodness of the Creator.
Augustine	<i>City of God</i> , XI–XII; <i>On the Trinity</i> , III	Creation, light, beatitude, the angelic fall and created agents under providence.

Witness	Work used	Contribution to the account
Dionysius the Areopagite, traditional attribution	<i>Celestial Hierarchy</i> , I–XV	Sacred order, participation, the nine ranks, illumination and the interpretation of scriptural images.
Gregory the Great	<i>Homilies on the Gospels</i> , II.34	The orders, their ministries and the ethical fruit of their contemplation.
John Damascene	<i>Exposition of the Orthodox Faith</i> , II.3–4	Spiritual nature, finite presence, received immortality, ministry and the fall.
Origen	<i>Commentary on Matthew</i> , XIII.26–29	Inquiry into the beginning of guardianship and the interpretation of Matthew 18:10.
John Chrysostom	<i>Homilies on Matthew</i> , 59.4	Care for the little ones and the dignity of their heavenly guardians.
Bonaventure	<i>Commentary on the Second Book of Sentences</i> , d. 3	Spiritual matter and form as an account of created angelic composition.
Thomas Aquinas	<i>Summa theologiae</i> , I qq. 50–64, 106–114; III q. 8 a. 4, q. 30; selected parallels	The systematic account of nature, knowledge, love, grace, fall, hierarchy and ministry.
Lateran IV and Vatican I	<i>Firmiter credimus</i> ; <i>Dei Filius</i>	Creation, divine freedom, the goodness of nature and the voluntary fall.
Pius XII	<i>Humani generis</i> , 26	Angelic personality and the gratuity of the supernatural order.
The Catholic Church	<i>Catechism</i> , 328–336, 391–395	The doctrinal synthesis of creation, Christ’s primacy, guardianship and fallen spirits.
Congregation for Divine Worship	<i>Directory on Popular Piety</i> , 213–217	The Church’s direction of devotion to the angels.
Roman and Byzantine liturgical witnesses	Identified Missals and calendar witness in the liturgical appendix	The celebration of the angels within the Church’s worship.

The bibliography identifies editions and translations. The table gives the role of each principal witness in the exposition; an author quoted within Aquinas’s argument remains identifiable as an authority invoked by Aquinas.

L Scope, Corpus, and Qualifications

This study addresses readers approaching Catholic angelology through Scripture, the Fathers and the systematic teaching of Thomas Aquinas. Its question is how created spirits receive being, knowledge, love and beatitude, and how they participate in divine providence. Its exposition and reference tables are aids to study, not an official catechism or an ecclesiastical judgment.

The systematic census covers every article of *Summa theologiae* I questions 50–64 and 106–114. It records the article’s question, determination, authority and grade; it does not reproduce every objection and reply. The *Celestial Hierarchy* is expounded through its fifteen chapters. Other works of Aquinas and the patristic, scholastic, Byzantine, magisterial and liturgical witnesses enter at the identified loci actually used. Those selections are not an exhaustive corpus of angelology, and the Dionysian concordance does not claim to count every citation throughout Aquinas’s works.

Grades. “Defined” identifies a proposition taught in the named conciliar profession or definition. “Church teaching” identifies other magisterial teaching. “Common teaching” describes agreement supported by the witnesses named. “Thomist position” attributes a systematic determination to Aquinas; another school’s position is named where it is examined. “Disputed” identifies an actual open disagreement in the witnesses. “Pious tradition” and “Apocryphal” identify their respective devotional or extra-canonical status where used. These grades are editorial assessments of particular propositions; the cited source supplies their basis. A question containing several propositions does not receive one undifferentiated doctrinal rank.

Language and witnesses. Biblical quotations follow the registered Douay–Rheims/Challoner witness. Vulgate book names and numbering are used; Hebrew psalm numbering is supplied where different. Aquinas’s English is identified with the English Dominican translation and controlled at selected Latin loci; Dionysius’s English follows John Parker’s historical translation. The source register identifies the translation and the degree of checking for each witness. A searchable transcription is not a critical edition or a claim of complete manuscript collation. Greek terms are transliterated; English order names are reconciled in the terminology table.

History and interpretation. The Dionysian corpus’s traditional attribution and its late fifth-/early sixth-century historical setting are distinguished where they affect a claim. Patristic interpretations are presented within Catholic theological tradition. Differences among witnesses are attributed to the authors who express them. The calendar tables identify their particular books and do not supply a local ordo for an unspecified diocese. Official web witnesses and devotional discipline were consulted as of 29 September 2026.

Rights and use. Historical translations and quoted source texts retain their recorded public-domain or other status; the project’s license does not relicense them. Modern official texts are cited and briefly paraphrased. No prayer is newly composed or adapted for recitation. The treatment of fallen angels supplies no method for diagnosing possession or conducting deliverance. No independent human theological review, *nihil obstat*, or *imprimatur* is claimed.

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Online witnesses were consulted on 29 September 2026 unless a retained edition date is specified. The references identify the sources used; their source-local qualifications concern the particular witnesses named.

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