**Hierarchy of Angels Blog Post**

Few people have full historical insight into what angels really look like and do according to Christian doctrine. The typical portrayal of angels are as winged beings who help save a person in need, or even perhaps a sweet, childlike Cherub as seen on paintings. However, the classical Christian hierarchy of angels portrays a much more diverse set of celestial beings.

Angels appear in the Bible more than 250 times (1), and although a specific ranking doesn’t appear directly in the Bible, Christian philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius used passages from the New Testament to outline a widely used angelic hierarchy.

The official hierarchy is divided into three choirs ranked from the highest to the lowest orders.

Highest order: Involved directly with God.

**Seraphim**

The highest order of angels is the Seraphim, who work in immediate contact with God and are exuberantly devoted to His work. In fact, the verb *sarap* originally means *to burn*, whether it’s literally or with passion and love. (2)

Seraphim are mentioned directly in the Book of Isaiah 6:2-7 (KJV) stating:

**2**Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. **3** And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory...**6** Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: **7** And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

This is one of two times the three-fold invocations of “holy, holy, holy” is mentioned in the Bible. The second time, in Revelations 4:8, also refers to the Seraphim singing their praise and devotion to God and his creations. (3)

One of the other distinguishing features of the Seraphim are their six wings. Two wings cover their feet, two cover their face, and two are used to fly. These wings are thought to symbolize humility before God and complete focus and devotion on fulfilling his will.

**Cherubim**

The second highest tier of angels are the Cherubim. They are mentioned in the New Testament as guardians of the apocalypse. (4) However, their debut in the Bible was in Genesis for their role guarding the Garden of Eden. They are also well-known for their divine wisdom and high level of knowledge.

Images of the Cherubim were the only images allowed in the ancient Jewish temples. (5) They were depicted on embroideries and carved figures within holy sites. They are still frequently seen on tabernacles and Eucharistic vessels today.

Unlike the Seraphim, the Cherubim have four faces and four wings. Their four faces include an ox, lion, man, and eagle, and they move quickly as if spun on a wheel. There are several interpretations of what the four creatures represent. Some believe they are four domains of God’s rule on Earth, and for others they are four distinct attributes of God.

Ezekiel 1:6-9 (KJV) goes into detail of their appearance:

In appearance their form was human, **6** but each of them had four faces and four wings. **7** Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. **8** Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, **9** and the wings of one touched the wings of another.

Their primary role was also to serve in close contact with God with the grace of immense wisdom.

**Thrones**

Thrones are the last tier in the highest order of angels. The lower ranks of angels have access to the higher tiers through the Thrones.

Thrones are mentioned in Colossians 1:16 (KJV):

**16** For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

They are often depicted as wheels covered in eyes (sometimes with wings) that appear to roll interconnected throughout the heavens. This depiction is related to the Ophanim, which is derived from not the Christian, but the Jewish angel hierarchy. (7) According to Daniel’s vision in The Book of Daniel 7:9, God moves around the heavens on his throne of moving wheels, often equated with the Thrones. (7)

From this imagery, they are known for their peace and complete submission as the literal seat of exaltation for God.

Middle order: Involved closer to the cosmological and earthly realms.

**Dominions**

The Dominions are thought to be guardians of the cosmos and restorers of justice in the universe of creation. It is believed that the Dominions helped fulfill God’s will by destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but allowing the faithful and repentant time and guidance to leave beforehand. (6)

They are the angelic tier dedicated to delivering God’s justice and guiding the lower angelic realms, while also remaining loving and merciful. They are most often illustrated as beautiful human beings with lustrous wings.

**Virtues**

The Virtues are believed to help maintain the harmony of nature on earth and look after other celestial bodies. They also help those who are struggling with their faith to be filled with encouragement, guidance, and virtue. Virtues may renew faith and help humanity by producing signs and miracles that occur on Earth.

Pseudo-Dionysius describes them as (8):

The name of the holy Virtues signifies a certain powerful and unshakable virility welling forth into all their Godlike energies; ... ascending unwaveringly to the superessential Virtue which is the Source of virtue: fashioning itself, as far as it may, in virtue; perfectly turned towards the Source of virtue, and flowing forth providentially to those below it, abundantly filling them with virtue.

**Powers**

The Powers are concerned with order and harmony in the material realms. They are often depicted as wearing armor, swords, or other battlefield regalia while fighting against evil spirits. Powers have strength over the devil and can assist those who are struggling with dark vices and entities.

It is thought that Powers can also be fallen angels of darkness as mentioned in Ephesians 6:12 (KJV):

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Lowest order: Involved with the earthly realm and humanity.

**Principalities**

The highest of the final order of angels are the Principalities, who serve as protectors of groups, such as nations or institutions. They are tasked with fulfilling divine will in the physical realm. Principalities have direct authority to command orders from above and affect change on Earth.

Pseudo-Dionysius characterizes them below (9):

The name of the Celestial Principalities signifies their Godlike *princeliness* and au­thoritativeness in an Order which is holy and most fitting to the princely Powers.

They maintain order and structure within the Church, rulers, or any governing actors on Earth.

**Archangels**

The word Archangel derives from the Greek word *archein,* meaning first in rank and the Greek word *angelos*, meaning messenger.

According to the Book of Tobias 12:15 (DRC) there are seven archangels who serve God’s missions:

For I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven, who stand before the Lord.

The seven archangels are linked to the seven sacraments in Catholicism.

One of the most famous archangels is Archangel Michael. He spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai in the Bible, helped expel Lucifer from Heaven, and has been said to be the angel that inspired John to write the book of Revelations.

Archangel Gabriel is the archangel who told Mary of her conception and assisted Daniel in his mission in the Book of Daniel. He is considered to be an archangel, but is not specifically referenced with that term in the Bible.

Archangel Raphael is mentioned in the Book of Tobit (above), is only in the Canon for Catholic, Orthodox, and Angelican Churches. He is regarded to be an angel of healing and medicine.

Archangel Uriel in recognized by the Russian Orthodox and Angelican Churches in the Book of Ezra and the Book of Enoch, but isn’t mentioned in the Western Churches’ Bible.

As a whole, archangels are associated with protection of the Church and nations. They are portrayed as fighting demons and darkness in the world and being trusted messengers and actors in the favor of God’s will on Earth.

**Angels**

Angels, also known as *malakhim* in Hebrew, are the most likely to be concerned and involved with the material world and people on Earth. They are seen to be readily available and act as messengers between people or between a person and God.

Many Christians believe that each person gets at least one guardian angel to protect against evil and to assist when called on for their safety and well-being. Angels give a reminder of the sense of importance in each individual’s unique calling and mission on Earth since every person is assigned one, no matter their worldly status.

Angels may sometimes appear as humans, without their popular depiction of wings, while assisting those who need help.

Most people see angels as flying helpers with wings, but rarely is the full explanation of each choir explained. Angels are diverse in their appearance, qualities, and roles but work in perfect organization and fulfillment God’s will.

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