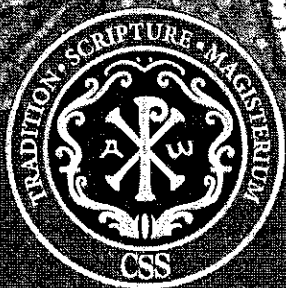
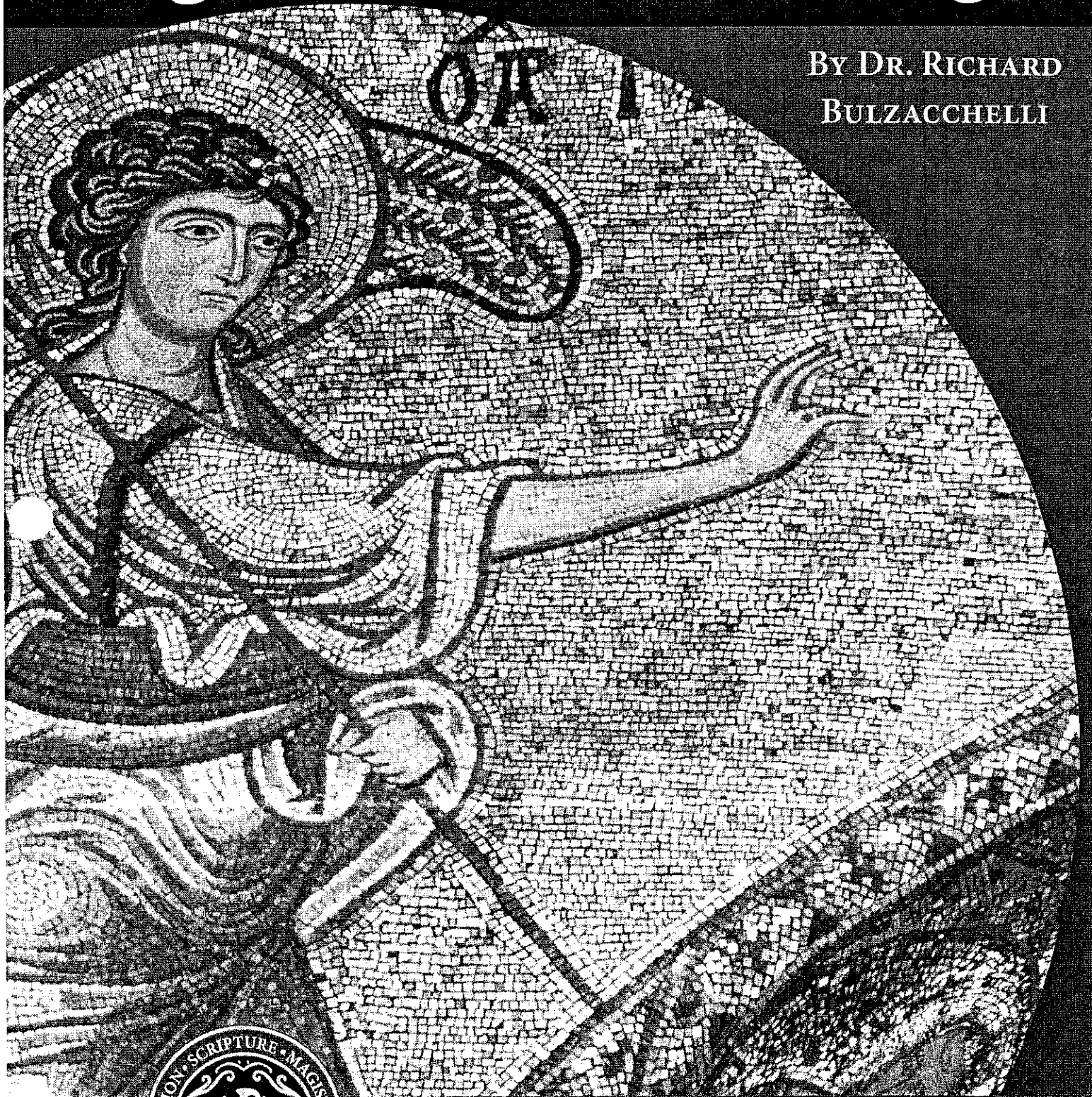


• *Angels throughout the Ages*

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Printed in the United States of America

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Editor: Sandra Bennett Fountain
Layout and Production: Malcolm Schluenderfritz

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Angels throughout the Ages

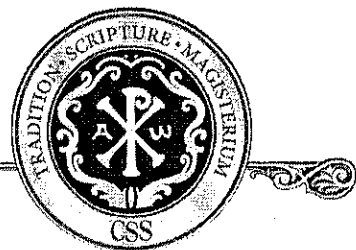
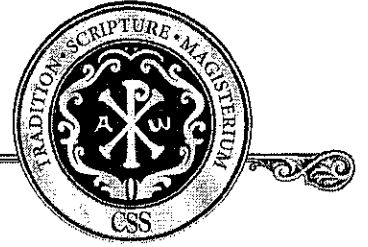


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Angels Throughout the Ages



LESSON 1: Who are the Angels?

INTRODUCTION:

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED THE some of the angels in the Bible have names and others don't? Have you ever wondered why? It's because **the idea of angels as distinct spiritual beings—spiritual beings created by God, but not a part of the corporeal world—was a fairly late development in the consciousness of the Hebrew people.** In many instances in the Old Testament, and even in some instances in the New Testament, the word “angel” refers only to a manifestation of God’s presence as he communicates with human beings. But as time went on, the Hebrew people began to perceive a complex spiritual landscape inhabited by distinct creatures with personalities much like their own. These beings were increasingly seen to play an active role in human affairs, so when the term “angel” was applied to them, it was often applied in conjunction with a name. There’s a flip side, of course, to the angels. There are also the demons. The Hebrew idea of the demonic realm also evolved over time, just as had their idea of the angelic realm. At first, the angelic and the

demonic realms were seen as the same reality. The angels were just created spirits who, like us, could be more or less good or bad. The figure of the Satan as he appears in the Book of Job is an example of the sort of ambiguity that we see in the early stages of the development of Hebrew thinking about angels and demons. The Satan is seen there as a member of the heavenly Court of Yahweh, clearly subject to him, and obviously created by him, but nonetheless, present to him in a relationship that cannot be dismissed as entirely hostile.

Over time, however, Hebrew thinking about angels and demons developed to the point of placing angels and demons in clear and definite antagonism toward one another. The angels were on the side of God, and the demons had taken up arms against him. By the time we arrive at the Book of Revelation, “the paint has dried,” as it were, on this portrait of the spiritual plane of the cosmos.

In the course of these fifteen lessons, we’re going to meet some of these angels and demons—some of the angels and demons featured in the Bible as distinct spiritual

persons, with names and identities. We'll treat them like real people we would actually meet in our lives, because that's how they're portrayed in the Bible. Who are they? What do they do? And what do their names teach us about who they are?

In this, our first and introductory lesson, we'll ask a purely historical question: how

did the idea of angels and demons actually develop? Why did this idea come about? The answer lies in the relationship between the ancient Hebrew people and the cultures that surrounded them. It has to do with how the Hebrew people thought about the false gods—the *baalim*—of their gentile neighbors.

POINTS TO PONDER:

The Faith of the Bible traces back to Abraham, the “exalted father” of all those who worship the One, True God. But what we need to remember is that **Abraham became our Father in Faith when he experienced a revelation from God and entered into covenant with him.** Before that, Abraham was a pagan, like everyone else in the ancient world of his time. God called out to Abraham and revealed his heart and will to him. When Abraham accepted this revelation from God, it changed his life and his whole perspective on reality. The content of that revelation is the “Promise” that Abraham would pass on to his heirs, and that was so vast and so deep that it could not be contained within the limits of his own biological line of descent.

Before that happened, Abraham (or Abram, as he was called back then) was just another man from Ur, in Chaldee, in the regions of Babylon. He was probably of a good man, and a pious man, but he did

not know God, and was left to discern the truth about the world and about the meaning and destiny of human life on the basis of what we could know just by looking up the heavens and out across the sea. For without God's self-revelation, we can no more know who God really is than we can know the man across the hall in Apartment 2B without having met him. We certainly could not know what he thinks of us, or where we stand with him.

But since God is invisible, and all we can see of him are his effects in the world, things get even harder for us. Not only do we not know who he is, but we have to try to piece together bits and pieces of evidence to form some sort of a profile for him. The evidence is sometimes ambiguous or unclear, and we have to think very carefully and clearly to try to sort it all out and assemble a working model in our minds. The results of this process are often a mixed bag.



It wasn't until very late in the game, historically, that the great philosophical monotheisms began to appear in the thought of people like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Long before anyone arrived at their understanding of the idea of God, people generally believed that the world was a mix of opposing forces, some favorable and others hostile, and that these forces were closely linked with spiritual personalities called "gods"—or that these forces even were, in themselves, personified by those gods. It was out of a cultural context like this that

our Father Abraham was called by God to receive the truth and remember it to his children for all generations to come. But it took time for all the details of this new vision of reality to come clearly into view.

In the mean time, those who inherited the promise of Abraham were still more or less products of a polytheistic and even animist culture—seeing the world as somehow permeated, from top to bottom, by a spiritual presence. So these people maintained, alongside the developing Covenant with Yahweh Elohim, personal cults to highly

localized spirits called “elim”. Eventually, the elim would have to be abandoned once and for all, but the overwhelming force of influence from the surrounding cultures would constantly present new temptations to the Hebrew people, enticing them, once again, to turn away from the exclusive worship of Yahweh Elohim and admit into their religious lives, any number and variety of lesser “gods.”

POLYTHEISTIC	Belief in more than one god.
ANIMIST	Belief in the existence of individual spirits that inhabit natural objects and phenomena

These *elim* were seen to have some sort of mastery over human life with its twists and turns, its ups and downs, its sorrows and joys, often disconnected from any variable in our own control. So we called these *elim* by a title: *baalim*—a word that means something like *lords* or *maters*. An individual god or *el* would be a *baal*. And when a particular god grew in stature in the minds of his worshippers, that god might come to be called simply, Baal.

As time went on, these lesser gods were

seen as utterly powerless and even unreal. They were figments of the imagination. Yet, their mysterious ability to capture the hearts of men and women, even from the loving and provident hands of Yahweh Elohim kept the idea alive that there were, in fact, spiritual personalities in the heavenly realm other than Yahweh Elohim, even if they were totally unlike him in every other respect. Faith in Yahweh Elohim meant the understanding that there is only one real God, and that he is absolutely beyond anything we encounter in this life. **Yahweh Elohim is the source of the being of everything else there is—“of all things,” as we say in the Nicene Creed, “visible and invisible.”**

But if all of this is true, then the spiritual personalities still appear to exert influence over our lives, sometimes attending mystical experiences that draw us more fully into Covenant with God, and sometimes leading us astray, must themselves be creatures, like us. **Angels belong to a different plane of reality than we do, but they are willed into being by God, just the same.** It is from this realization that the biblical concept of angels and demons gradually took hold in the minds of the People Israel.

This gradually deepening awareness can be seen in the pages of the Bible as we move from earlier to later texts. There, we can see, if we take the time, the movement from a matter-of-fact acceptance of alternative spiritual personalities (as



in the heavenly courtiers featured in the book of Job), to the utter falseness and deadness of the baalim (as in Eli-

jah's demonstration to the priests of Baal in Phoenicia—**incidentally, the name Elijah means, My God is Yahweh,** and finally, to a re-appearance of distinct spiritual personalities (as in the case of the angel Raphael and the demon Asmodeus featured in the book of Tobit).

Now, there are three angels specifically named in the Bible, and a few demons as well. But sorting out who's who is not always easy. In the next fourteen lessons, we'll take a careful look at some of these figures, and try to place them where they belong in the biblical narrative. One figure will have to garner more attention than he deserves, because he has muscled his way into the picture from the dawn of time. That figure is known by many names, but for now, we will call him only Satan.



VOICES OF THE SAINTS

St. Thomas Aquinas

“A created intellect cannot see the essence of God unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it. This mode of knowing God is natural to an angel—namely, to know Him by His own likeness refulgent in the angel himself. But to know God by any created likeness is not to know the essence of God...”



4. What is the meaning of the word *baal*?

5. Who are the three angels actually mentioned in the Bible? (See Daniel 12:1; Tobit 12:17; Luke 1:19)

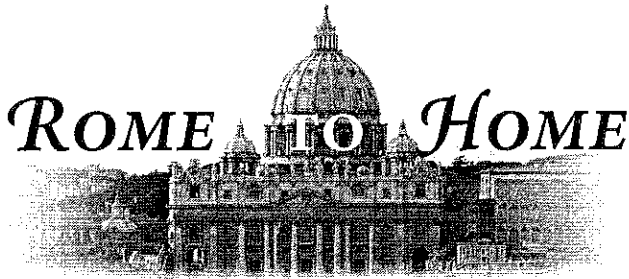


CATECHISM CONNECTIONS

CCC 212-214 describes the uniqueness of the one, true God, who revealed himself to ancient Israel as “HE WHO IS,” the one “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

REFLECTION QUESTION

If you knew nothing about Judaism or Christianity, but lived in the world of Abram before Yahweh revealed himself to him, do you think belief in the pagan gods would have seemed reasonable? If so, why, if not, why not? Remember, try to put yourself in that time and place, and try to imagine what the universe must have looked like to people back then, given what they could know and the tools they had to learn more.



We believe in one only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator of things visible such as this world in which our transient life passes, of things invisible such as the pure spirits which are also called angels, and creator in each man of his spiritual and immortal soul. We believe that this only God is absolutely one in His infinitely holy essence as also in all His perfections, in His omnipotence, His infinite knowledge, His providence, His will and His love. He is He who is, as He revealed to Moses, and He is love, as the apostle John teaches us: so that these two names, being and love, express ineffably the same divine reality of Him who has wished to make Himself known to us, and who, "dwelling in light inaccessible" is in Himself above every name, above every thing and above every created intellect.

POPE PAUL VI,

The Credo of the People of God, June 30, 1968