

## HARTS STUDENT'S CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

### CHAPTER X

#### First Article of the Creed (continued)

#### CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH: THE ANGELS.

##### The Angels

The highest and most perfect of all God's creatures, by reason of the excellence of their nature, are the Angels, those pure spirits endowed with power, free-will, and intelligence, who surround the throne of God, "*His ministers who do His will*" (Ps. cii. 21). The angelic nature is far superior to that of man, having in it nothing material or corporeal. They are unlike the spirit or soul of man, which was formed by God to animate a body, and has a natural tendency to it. But though they have no body themselves, they possess the power of appearing to us under bodily forms.

##### Creation of the Angels

We know for certain that the Angels were made before the sin of our first parents, since it was one of the fallen angels who assumed the form of a serpent to tempt Eve; and there are passages in Scripture which go to show that it was before the creation of man, and even before the formation of the world out of chaos. God Himself gives us to understand this in His words to holy Job: "*Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? upon where are its bases grounded? or who laid the corner-stone thereof, when the morning stars praised Me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody?*" (Job. xxxviii. 4, 7). Their creation, then, may reasonably be supposed to be expressed in the first verse of Genesis: "*In the beginning God created heaven and earth.*" Some of the Fathers see in the separation of the light from the darkness the rewarding of the good and the punishment of the fallen Angels.

##### Trial of the Angels

God created the Angels in the state of innocence, happy, and endowed with excellent gifts; but their happy state did not render them incapable of committing sin. He had created them free, and willed that they should undergo a trial in order that everlasting happiness with Him might be the reward of their fidelity. Nor did all remain steadfast under the trial. Many, by pride, rebelled against God, and, being in an instant changed into devils, were cast from Him forever down into the fires of hell: "*God spared not the angels that sinned*" (2 Pet. ii. 4). It is even believed that Lucifer, the leader in this revolt, drew after him a third part of the heavenly host.

## The number of Angels

Though the exact number of the Angels is nowhere stated in Scripture, it must be very great; and probably vastly surpasses the number of men that will have appeared on the earth from the time of man's creation to the end of the world. It is not difficult to understand this if we consider that Almighty God assigns to each particular soul created by Him a separate Angel as its guardian. And if God created man to fill in heaven the place of the lost Angels, who are supposed to have formed a third part of the heavenly host, we may well wonder at the magnitude of their number. According to the Prophet Daniel: "*Thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him*" (Dan. vii. 10). And St. John, in the Apocalypse, tells us how he saw around the throne of the Lamb a multitude of Angels: "*And the number of them was thousands of thousands*" (v. 11).

## The Nine Choirs

According to the common opinion of the Fathers, the Angels are divided into three hierarchies, and each hierarchy into three choirs:

1. Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones.
2. Dominations, Principalities, and Powers.
3. Virtues, Archangels, and Angels.

## The name Angel

The Angels are thus named from a Greek word meaning *sent*, or *messenger*, a name which describes rather their office than their nature, and which is common to all the blessed spirits, irrespective of hierarchies or choirs. Only three of the heavenly host are known to us under special names: **Gabriel**, "*the strength of God*," announced the Incarnation; **Michael**, "*who is like unto God*," led the faithful hosts against Lucifer and his rebel Angels; **Raphael**, "*the remedy of God*," conducted the younger Tobias to Rages and back.

## The bad Angels

The fallen Angels, though condemned to everlasting torments, are not always confined to the limits of hell, but great numbers, still bearing their torments with them, are permitted by God to come upon the earth for the trial of men. So great is their malice against us, who have been invited to fill their places in heaven, that St. Peter bids us "*Be sober, and watch; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith*" (1 Pet. v. 8, 9). In their envy and hatred they lay snares for us that, by leading us into sin, they may drag us along with them in

the broad road to destruction.

Not only do the demons tempt man to sin, but, by means of *possession*, they are allowed sometimes to affect the body: yet their power is limited, and they can never harm us beyond what God permits, as we see in the example of holy Job. Even their temptations are permitted only for the trial of our virtue, and, if we ask it, God will always give us the grace necessary to triumph over all their attacks "*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. a. 13). If, then, we are overcome, the fault is always our own. Their designs, too, are often defeated by the care of our Angel guardians for us: "*He hath given His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone*" (Ps. xc. 11, 12).

### **The good Angels**

The chief occupation of the good Angels is to adore and praise God without intermission for all eternity: "*They rested not day and night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come*" (Apoc. iv. 8). "*And I heard the voice of many Angels, saying: The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction*" (Apoc. v. 11. 12).

Another office of the good Angels is to take part, as God's ministers, in the government of the visible and the invisible world, and especially to execute the Divine commands in regard to what concerns man's salvation. It is by the ministry of Angels that all the greatest events mentioned in the Old and in the New Testament have been brought about: "*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation ?*" (Heb. i. 14).

### **Angel Guardians**

It is the teaching of the Church that everyone has a guardian Angel appointed by God as his special protector throughout life; so that the good Angels, besides their office of praising God in heaven and acting as His ministers and messengers, watch over and assist us in our sojourn upon earth: "*See that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. xviii. 10). It is moreover generally believed, and is implied by the Sacred Scriptures, that Churches, provinces, nations, and empires have also their appointed Angel guardians. St. Michael was the special protector of Israel, and is now venerated as the guardian Angel of the Church of God. And in the Acts most interpreters see the guardian Angel of Macedonia in the Macedonian who implored St. Paul, on behalf of the province which he guarded to pass over and preach to that province (xvi. 9).

Our guardian Angels defend us not only against spiritual evils, but against bodily evils also: "*Behold, I will send My angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared*" (Exod. xxiii. 20). How we should love them, then, and with what confidence we should recommend ourselves to them in all dangers and temptations! "*The angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear Him, and shall defend them*" (Ps. xxxiii. 8).