Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages

David Keck

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DAVID KECK

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Preface

The completion of a project is a time for giving thanks, and there are several people whose support and assistance have been essential for this book.

Professors Steven Ozment and Thomas N. Bisson, the advisors under whom my original dissertation on medieval angelology was written, were model mentors who both challenged and encouraged the project. A Woodrow Wilson Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities provided me with the financial support needed for doctoral work. As a graduate student, I was fortunate to enjoy many late-night collegial conversations about medieval history with Robert F. Berkhofer, III. Pamela Sheingorn and Adelaide Bennett Hagens helped me with many aspects of medieval iconography. Christopher B. Brown provided me with several important angelological references from the Reformation, and was of invaluable assistance in the final preparation of this manuscript. The contributions of Cynthia Read and Lisa Stallings of Oxford University Press have been crucial throughout the stages of book production.

Most importantly, my family has supported me constantly, and this book is dedicated to them. To my father, Leander, who fostered my intellectual curiosity. To my mother, Janice, who read my first homework assignments but who can no longer read or write. To my brother, Stephen, who has always been a guardian angel to me. To my wife, Karin Lindt Gollin, whose love surpasses the ardor of the seraphim, and to our new daughter, Olivia Susanna, who is now one year and a day old.

Let me give thanks.

Manila, The Philippines
Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels, 1997

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Introduction

The Plenitude of Medieval Angelology

From the great shrines dedicated to Michael the Archangel at Mont-Saint-Michel and Monte Gargano to the elaborate metaphysical speculations of the great thirteenth-century scholastics, angels permeated the physical, temporal, and intellectual landscape of the medieval West. Sculptures, stained glass, coins, clerical vestments, and pilgrim's badges all bore images of the celestial spirits. Each September 29 on the Feast of Saint Michael, clerics all across Christendom deliv-erce uermons on and offered prayers to Michael and his cohorts. By the thirteenth century, angelology had become a required, formal part of the theological curriculum at the University of Paris, and Bonaventure, Aquinas, and their fellow scholastics were required to develop complex angelological systems. So pervasive were angelic matters that a manuscript for a medieval miracle play provides stage directions for portraying an angel "teleporting" a man from one place to another. In the Middle Ages, angels were ubiquitous.

How angels came to permeate medieval Christian society is the subject of this book. (Jewish and Muslim angelology, both vast and important topics in their own rights, are considered only to the extent that they influenced Christian angelology.) Medieval Christian angelology is a subject with many, many stories and questions. How did angels become a required part of the curriculum at the University of Paris? Why do angels appear on baptismal fonts? How and why did angels become normative for certain members of the church? What were the popular beliefs about angels, and did these diverge from the angelologies of theologians? Why did some heretics, such as the Revolutionary of the Upper Rhine, claim to derive their authority from heavenly spirits? Which of the many beliefs concerning angels (and fallen angels) appeared for the first time in the medieval period, which were inherited, and which were evolving into new forms?

It is by no means clear how angels came to be linked to nearly every aspect of medieval life. Despite the recent resurgence of popular interest in angels, scholars of the Middle Ages have devoted little attention to the spirits of heaven. Angels are not central to Christianity, as is Christ or the church, and historians and

theologians of the twentieth century have been preoccupied with other issues. Thus the full plenitude of medieval angelology and an assessment of its significance has yet to be presented. Arguably, given the widespread importance of angels to the men and women of the Middle Ages, the subject of medieval angelology is the most neglected topic in medieval studies. Several scholars have studied aspects of medieval angelology, however, and their work provides windows onto some of the doctrines, practices, controversies, and texts that together constitute the medieval world's comprehensive engagement with the angels of heaven.

Most modern studies of medieval angelology focus almost exclusively on the scholastic treatment of angels. The impetus given to Christian philosophy and metaphysics by Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* in 1879 led neo-Thomists such as Etienne Gilson and J. D. Collins to explore the metaphysical and philosophical aspects of scholastic angelology with great care. Gilson's chapters on the angelologies of Aquinas and Bonaventure in his books on their respective Christian philosophies are perhaps the most lucid treatment of scholastic angelology ever written. Collins's *The Thomistic Philosophy of the Angels* remains the most detailed analysis of the origins and meaning of the Angelic Doctor's angelology (tradition ascribes the origin of this epithet both to the purity of Aquinas's teachings and to their heavenly character).[1] These studies reveal that the leading thinkers of medieval Christendom, theologians such as Aquinas and Ockham, were fascinated with angels and explored their mysteries tenaciously. To the scholastics, the universe required the existence of angels, and the theologian had a special responsibility to uncover and describe their sublime nature. Recent essays by Marcia L. Colish, Nancy van Deusen, and Edith Sylla demonstrate that there is yet much important work to be done even in this familiar field of scholastic angelology.[2]

Another important group of secondary studies on angels, which includes works by Daniel Callahan, Nora Stein von Baditz, and Olga Rojdestvensky, has examined the cult of Saint Michael the Archangel. Of all of the angels, Michael was by far the most important in the Middle Ages. Bonaventure is not unusual when he extols this spirit and his role in the divine economy to popes, cardinals, Franciscans, Beguines, and laypeople. The origins of the cult of Saint Michael remain obscure (it has been suggested that he replaced the pagan worship of Mercury). By the early eighth century, however, major shrines existed at Monte Gargano in southern Italy and at Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy. (Michael seems to favor high places, and many shrines were established on mountains and hills where he appeared to the faithful.) Throughout Europe, Christians dedicated numerous churches and chapels to this angel who, according to Apocalypse 12, is the vanquisher of Satan and his minions. A measure of the popularity of the worship of the archangel is the twelfth-century *Roman du Saint Michel*, written to celebrate the pilgrimages performed on his annual feast, Michaelmas, September 29. Countless clerics delivered sermons and homilies on the angels on the annual celebration, and lords carried his image on their banners in battle.

Other focused treatments examine diverse aspects of the spirits of heaven. Jean Daniélou's *The Angels and their Mission* and Eric Peterson's *The Angels and the Liturgy* survey the patristic discussions of angelology that the Middle Ages inherited and continued to expound. Paul Heinze's *Die Engel auf der mitteralterlichen*

Mysterienbühne Frankreichs collates the data on angels in medieval drama. Steven Chase's *Angelic Wisdom: The Cherubim and the Grace of Contemplation in Richard of St. Victor* carefully examines the importance of Richard's exegesis of the cherubim of Exodus 25 for his understanding of how human beings can experience the immediate presence of God. And Clara Erskine Clement's *Angels in Art* and Jean Villette's *L'Ange dans l'art d'Occident du xiième-xvième siècle* examine the depiction of angels in medieval Christian art. The picture of angels in medieval Christianity, however, remains fragmented.

For the most part the social, professional, and pastoral contexts of angelology are overlooked. Why did men and women seek the help of the angels in very worldly matters—protection in battle, safe voyages, healing? How did competition between university masters lead them to develop increasingly intricate angelologies? The scholastics who wrote textbooks also prayed, celebrated the Eucharist, and heard confessions. Angels could be an integral part of each of these activities, as they transmitted prayers to God, shared the singing of the *Sanctus*, and performed penitential functions. Consequently, scholastic texts should be read both in terms of the evolution of ideas and in the context of the devotional and pastoral lives of both masters and students. Similarly, discussions of iconographic traditions and angelic liturgical functions need to be interpreted in light of medieval drama, sermons, and popular works if the vitality and variety of medieval Christianity's rich engagement with angels is to emerge. In short, we still lack an integrated *Summa Angelologiae*; it is this gap that this study seeks to fill.

A comprehensive history of such a multifaceted, syncretic topic presents certain methodological and heuristic difficulties, the most difficult of which is how to disentangle, analyze, interpret, and reweave the different threads of the tapestry. The task requires a wide net for sources; the net must be wide enough to catch traces of angels and angelic beliefs in as many portions of the medieval world as possible. Metaphysics and mystery plays, prayers and pilgrimages, Cathars and cathedrals—these and many more disparate sources together reveal medieval society engaged with angels on all levels and indeed in some unlikely fashions. A range of sources also allows for comparison and contrast. In some respects, the angelology of Bernard of Clairvaux hardly differs from that of Aquinas, but on others, particularly on questions of metaphysics, the Cistercian would not have been able to understand the writings of a man suffused with the categories and concepts of both Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius. Further, juxtaposition of the writings of scholastics with evidence from art and other sources makes it possible to consider the relationship between formal and popular angelology.

A broad range of sources is essential to understand the evolution of medieval angelology and its continuities and discontinuities with the patristic era. On the one hand, the Middle Ages inherited and continued to promulgate many angelic traditions and doctrines. Scripture, the foundation of all Christian angelology, served as the basis for Augustine's and Aquinas's angelology just as it did for Ignatius, and part of the history of medieval angelology is simply the repetition of doctrines established centuries earlier. However, the eleventh through thirteenth centuries witnessed both deep changes and rich elaborations in angelology. As the cult of Mary developed, for example, so did the importance of

the role of the archangel Gabriel in the Annunciation and the drama of human salvation.

In an overview of the plenitude of medieval beliefs about angels, choosing between sources and foci is inevitable. I have chosen to employ one figure's work as a heuristic vehicle for gathering together the reflections and devotional practices of many theologians, clerics, and laypeople. Examining the disparate strands of medieval angelology as they come together in one person provides the framework for a coherent historical narrative that can encompass many centuries and many sources. Thus, we will be prepared to ask whether medieval angelology in general was a series of unrelated doctrines scattered over time and space or a range of practices and beliefs that informed each other and can be considered a whole. These problems are approached through continual reference to the life and writings of a single man, a man who was passionately dedicated to angels, Saint Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor (ca. 1217–74). Bonaventure's writings constitute the most complete picture of the roles of angels in the Middle Ages because the thirteenth century was the most important of all medieval centuries for angels, and because his professional career and own personal spiritual development brought him into contact with more elements of the thirteenth-century church than any other single figure. Indeed, he received the epithet of Seraphic Doctor both because of his spiritual and administrative leadership of the Franciscans (who came to be called the Seraphic Order after Saint Francis' encounter with the seraphic Christ on Mt. Alverna), and because his own life and diverse scholastic and devotional writings (in which the seraphim figure prominently) made him "seraphic," one who inflames others to love.

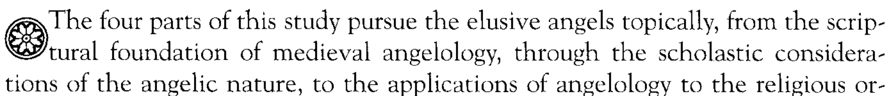
His century produced the flowering of medieval angelology. Both in popular practices and in the scholastic understanding of angels, institutional, intellectual, social, and economic developments combined to produce a Christian century replete with angels. The century of the Seraphic Doctor inherited the traditions surrounding the cult of Michael—the feast day, the shrines, and the sculptures in the churches and cathedrals. While Michael's cult had been relatively more important prior to the rise of Marian devotion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Michael continued to be a central figure in the thirteenth-century church and afterward. In the middle of the fourteenth century, France minted a coin, the angelus, which depicted him defeating Satan; and in 1469, Louis XI created the Order of Saint Michael. The thirteenth century also witnessed the culmination of the medieval university and Gothic architecture. The university formalized the professional study of angelology, and Gothic architecture's great monuments presented medieval Christians of all classes with images and stories of the spirits of heaven. This century additionally witnessed a revival of interest in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, whose *Celestial Hierarchy* was the most comprehensive of all patristic texts on angels. Most importantly, at this time Aristotle first became widely known to Western Christendom, and his teachings on "intelligences" and "separated substances" transformed the Christian understanding of angels by providing a coherent set of metaphysical concepts congenial to angelic speculation. As Aquinas and Bonaventure asked whether angels were composed of pure form or of form and matter, they were probing the very fabric of reality.

No century before the thirteenth produced an angelology as rich and thorough as those of the scholastics. Indeed, these theologians debated and resolved questions that their predecessors, such as Augustine and Bernard, had deliberately avoided. Arguably, no century after the thirteenth significantly advanced beyond the ideas of these theologians. (A case could be made that the seventeenth-century angelology of Francisco de Suarez was more developed, but I believe that it can also be shown that he essentially is following the scholastics' agenda.) Further, as the Apocalyptic prophecies of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1132–1202) began to capture the imagination of many thirteenth-century Christians (particularly Bonaventure and his fellow Franciscans), many turned to the Apocalypse and to the angels of the Apocalypse for clues about the fate of their own age. By the end of the century, many Christians were anticipating the arrival of an Angelic Pope, who would reform the corrupt and decadent church.

Bonaventure participated in almost every aspect of this angel-rich thirteenth-century church. Subsequent centuries would remember him for the many roles he played and the many offices he held. A fifteenth-century painting portrays him in simple Franciscan garb adorned with a cardinal's hat, a bishop's staff, and a robe trimmed with six-winged seraphs.[3] From 1236 to 1257, Bonaventure studied and taught Scripture, theology, and metaphysics in Paris. Annually he delivered a sermon on the Feast of Saint Michael. He wrote mystical and devotional treatises such as the *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*. He became the eighth minister general of the Franciscans in 1257 and ultimately the official author of Francis's *vita*. At the end of his life, he became a cardinal and a bishop. Having the ear of Louis IX and several popes, he was one of the most important figures in Christendom, and in each of these roles, he contemplated, wrote, and preached about the angels.

Because he was involved with so many aspects of the church, he wrote about angels in more contexts and with more agendas than any other single figure. Bonaventure's writings, taken as a whole, represent the fullest expression of medieval belief about angels by any author. In this study, his corpus serves both as a coherent introduction to medieval angelology in general and as a vehicle for engaging the writings and practices of other medieval men and women—Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Hugh of Saint Victor, Caesarius of Heisterbach, Aquinas, and many others. The sources for this investigation include both the familiar and the eclectic, the complex angelologies of scholastics and the seemingly off-handed but no less significant remarks of laypeople.

The story of the unfolding of angelology in the Middle Ages and the permeation of medieval society by angels culminates in the thirteenth century. By the year 1300, when Dante sets off on his poetic journey through the afterlife, angelic doctrines, habits, and expectations had reached their fullest expression, which later medieval centuries may continue, modify, or dismiss, but to which they do not significantly add.



The four parts of this study pursue the elusive angels topically, from the scriptural foundation of medieval angelology, through the scholastic considerations of the angelic nature, to the applications of angelology to the religious or-

ders, and finally to the roles of angels in the medieval church as a whole. This study proceeds historically within a theological framework, examining the historical evolution of particular angelological elements within each of the subject areas. Points of consensus and disagreement will be identified, but preferring a broad brush, I have concentrated on describing the angelological agenda of the Middle Ages as whole rather than on specific, lengthy historical evolutions or detailed doctrinal arguments.

The first two parts of this study, on Scripture and on academic theology, establish the basic "facts" concerning angels, the formal doctrinal content of medieval beliefs about the spirits of heaven. They establish the orthodox propositions concerning the angels (such as the number of angels and whether they have natural bodies) advanced by the leading theologians of the Middle Ages. Part I, "Scripture, the Foundation of Angelology," initiates the study because the Bible provides the basis for all Christian reflections on angels. Angels are present throughout Scripture, and must be confronted by all of its readers (even if they demythologize them, as many modern readers do). For medieval Christians, the Bible was the primary source for understanding their own lives and world. As Scripture presented the angels ministering to the faithful, worshipping God, chastising the wicked, or illuminating souls, so Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Jacobus de Voragine, and their contemporaries expected angels to serve these same functions in their own day. Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to this foundational material.

The last chapter of part I examines the principles of medieval exegesis of the angels of Scripture in the context of the typological relationships between biblical stories of angels and the medieval world. Both the literal narratives of Scripture and figurative readings of the Bible provided an immediate link between the angels of the Middle East and Christians of the medieval West. Medieval readers discerned not only their own historical continuity with the stories of Scripture but also specific allegorical prophecies and prefigurements that anticipated some of their own contemporaries and their experiences with angels. Scripture also revealed that there are many different types or orders of angels—seraphim, cherubim, powers, principalities, etc.—and their role in medieval exegesis and thought concludes chapter 3.

Part II, "Angels, the Philosopher, and the University: the Nature of the Angels," investigates the transformation wrought by the incorporation of Aristotelian logical, epistemological, and metaphysical concepts and categories into the traditional, rather unsophisticated angelology that the thirteenth century inherited. If Scripture provided the basis for angelology, pagan philosophy contributed the concepts and theological methods that enabled medieval scholastics to explore the mysteries of the angels with great precision and rigor. In the thirteenth century, angelology became at once a Christian science and a syncretic science. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which Aristotelian logic and the evolution of the University of Paris in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries combined to transform both the scope and techniques of medieval angelology. The evolution from the patristic angelology inherited by the early Middle Ages, as seen in Bernard of Clairvaux, to the early scholastic work of Robert Pullen, and ultimately to the complex angelologies of Aquinas and his colleagues clearly reveals

this process of transformation and expansion. Finally, chapter 5 explores Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences* as a representative text in order to detail and illuminate medieval ideas about the philosophical, physical, and metaphysical aspects of the nature of the angels.

Whereas the first two parts of this study focus on the doctrinal and propositional elements of angelology, the third and fourth parts explore the application of beliefs about angels to the medieval church as a whole. Part III, "Angels and Religious Orders," investigates the ways in which angels became normative for groups such as the Benedictines, Cistercians, and Franciscans. Chapter 6 concentrates on the monastics. For the cloistered, angels serve as powerful models of chastity, obedience, and devotion. In part because Christ appeared to Saint Francis in the form of a seraph, the Franciscans even more than members of the other religious orders, were dedicated angelologists. In chapter 7 it is seen that Bonaventure's writings addressing both orthodox and heretical Franciscan angelology constitute the most vigorous and sustained medieval treatment of angels in the midst of church crises.

Part IV, "Angels and the Medieval Church," explores the ways in which angels were integrated not only with scholastic theology and religious orders but with every aspect of the church. Building on the formal theological beliefs established in previous chapters, this section presents the roles of angels in the medieval church in the broadest possible scope. Chapters 8 and 9 adopt the life of an individual Christian as a heuristic device. Proceeding through each phase of life from birth through maturation and death, these chapters examine the ways in which angels impinged on medieval devotional lives and practices. Both ordinary beliefs concerning the angels (such as guardian angels) and irregular applications and expectations of angels (as in mysticism) receive examination. To medieval Christians, angels were inseparable from their experiences and expectations of the sacraments, mystery plays, demonic temptations, prayers, the church calendar, the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and every other element of their religious lives.

Finally, having synthesized material ranging from Scripture to church dedications, from metaphysics to mystery plays, from the battle-banners of knights to the devotional practices of monks and laypeople, the Conclusion, "The Harvest of Medieval Angelology," draws it all together and defines the particular characteristics of this curious subject. Rich descriptions of the traditions, evolutions, and revolutions that culminated in one era's angelological synthesis establish the ways in which angels were integral to medieval Christianity as a whole. Implicitly, this broad presentation thus seeks to foster an ambitious agenda. It demonstrates the need for subsequent, more detailed reinterpretations of many aspects of the Middle Ages in light of the plenitude of medieval angelology.

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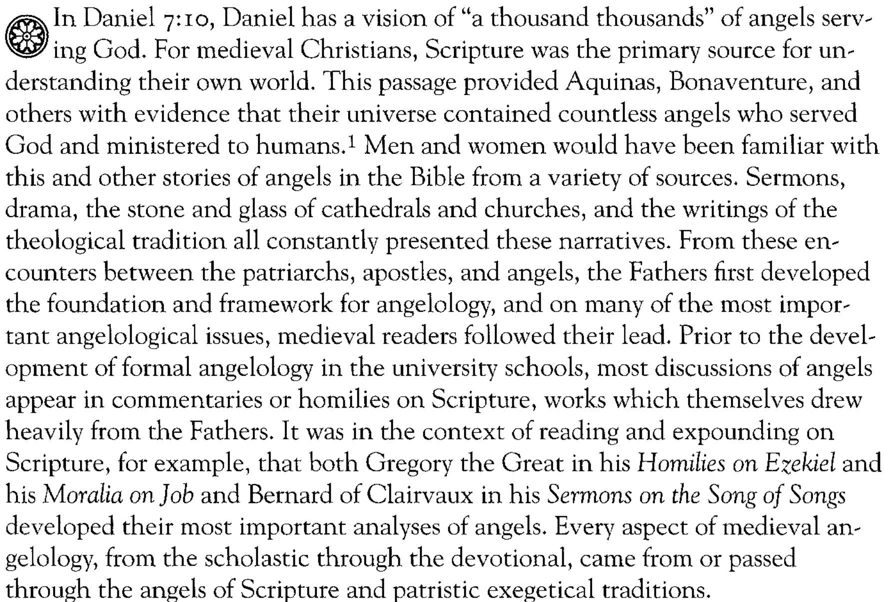
PART I

Scripture, the Foundation of Angelology



In Daniel 7:10, Daniel has a vision of "a thousand thousands" of angels serving God. For medieval Christians, Scripture was the primary source for understanding their own world. This passage provided Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others with evidence that their universe contained countless angels who served God and ministered to humans.[1] Men and women would have been familiar with this and other stories of angels in the Bible from a variety of sources. Sermons, drama, the stone and glass of cathedrals and churches, and the writings of the theological tradition all constantly presented these narratives. From these encounters between the patriarchs, apostles, and angels, the Fathers first developed the foundation and framework for angelology, and on many of the most important angelological issues, medieval readers followed their lead. Prior to the development of formal angelology in the university schools, most discussions of angels appear in commentaries or homilies on Scripture, works which themselves drew heavily from the Fathers. It was in the context of reading and expounding on Scripture, for example, that both Gregory the Great in his *Homilies on Ezekiel* and his *Moralia on Job* and Bernard of Clairvaux in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* developed their most important analyses of angels. Every aspect of medieval angelology, from the scholastic through the devotional, came from or passed through the angels of Scripture and patristic exegetical traditions.

No single treatise covers all of the biblical roles of the spirits of heaven and the ways in which medieval Christians interacted with them. Most men and women of the Middle Ages encountered the angels of Scripture in a wide variety of liturgical, devotional, or exegetical occasions, and hence no one wrote a compendium of angels in Scripture. Instead, the plethora of writings and other sources testifies to the fact that angelic exegesis was a vital and regular element of medieval Christendom. Prayers, sermons, records of visions, theological textbooks, and iconographic traditions each reveal clerics and laypeople addressing and discussing the angels of Scripture. A complete picture of the medieval understanding of these biblical spirits requires examination of a

diverse range of sources, and thus a heuristic framework is needed to piece the evidence together.

Three interwoven categories provide keys for understanding medieval angelic exegesis. (Exegesis, for these purposes, is most broadly construed to include devotional applications and other "readings" of the angels in Scripture.) Bonaventure's Prologue to his *Breviloquium*, a handbook of theology written for his fellow friars, follows Ephesians 3:14–19 and argues that Scripture exhibits three particular characteristics: length, depth, and height. By length, he means that the stories of the Bible contain the long, unbroken history of the salvation of humanity from the creation through the Last Judgment. By depth, he means the multiple levels of meaning (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical) any given passage may contain. By height, he refers to the series of hierarchies, including angelic hierarchies, that permeate the books of the Bible. Together, these three—the history of humanity's regeneration, the traditional fourfold view of Scripture, and the hierarchy of creatures—provide a useful framework for examining how medieval Christians as a whole read the angels of Scripture.

These three categories also suggest some of the dimensions of the vitality of medieval angelology. Length, depth, and height each invoke a different temporal relationship between angels and the medieval world. The narrative of human history enabled Christians to see how angels and humans have interacted in the past and will continue to interact in the future. The typological and anagogical levels of Scripture led people to see how angels permeate the present. The hierarchies of angels ultimately allowed Christians to contemplate not only transcendent, atemporal stability and permanence, but also the proper hierarchical ordering of society and the church. Although some of the categories overlapped (the hierarchies, for example, are active in temporal human affairs), these three different kinds of temporal relationships between Christians and angels constituted the basic ways in which exegetes read the angels of Scripture.

O • N • E

The Length of Scripture 1

Sacred History and the Creation

The Angels of History

Just as Christian history was illustrated in the portals of Notre Dame de Paris by sculptures of the biblical patriarchs, early church Fathers, and medieval saints, medieval Christians saw themselves in the context of an ongoing narrative that began in Genesis and would culminate in the Apocalypse. In viewing Abraham garbed as a medieval knight on the walls of a cathedral, they could figuratively see themselves in the narratives of Scripture. Relics, crusades, pilgrimages, and narratives of pilgrimages helped to establish a sense of an immediate connection between medieval Europe and the stories of ancient Israel and the early church. These narratives, the length of Scripture, provided a discrete set of historical experiences that defined the world (past, present, and future), human spiritual growth, and beliefs about angels. It was possible indeed to see in the history of Israel and its encounters with celestial spirits the story of the "restoration of the whole human race." Thus a late-eleventh-century pilgrims' chant asking Christ to send an angel to lead them characteristically employs images from several biblical stories of angels guiding humans.[1]

The basic doctrinal understanding of this narrative of human sin and divine salvific activity, and the roles of the angels in these, had been established in the patristic era. Jean Daniélou's *The Angels and Their Mission* presents his study of patristic angelology through the framework of this history of human salvation. The Middle Ages inherited the early church's readings of the angels of the Bible, and what is perhaps most striking is the basic continuity between the two eras. Isidore of Seville, for example, defers to Gregory the Great and Jerome in his discussion of angels in his *Etymologiae*. He raises no new questions and provides traditional responses to some of the frequently discussed angelological questions (such as why the angels are said to have wings—it is a sign of their swiftness in their ministries). Similarly, Honorius of Autun in the early twelfth century raises no new significant questions concerning the angels in his explorations of the creation and fall of the angels. Bernard of Clairvaux's angelic exegesis is essentially the same as numerous

patristic readings—the examples of continuity are endless.[2] Whereas the scholastics of the thirteenth century would develop new metaphysical approaches to the angels, medieval angelological exegesis was, despite certain exceptions that will be examined below, remarkably unoriginal. Indeed, the most noticeable medieval developments in this area, as will be seen, are matters of increased emphasis rather than originality.

As in the patristic era, different roles of the angels in the biblical narratives were emphasized at different times owing to the liturgical calendar, changing interests in particular books, and the needs of diverse devotional habits. September 29, the Feast of Saint Michael, became the annual occasion for reflecting on the ministries of the archangel as revealed in the books of Daniel, Jude, and the Apocalypse. The performance of a miracle or mystery play might present angels at the creation, just as debates over Aristotelian cosmological theories might evoke a complex discussion of whether angels participated in the creation as co-creators. The increasing importance of the cult of Mary produced a greater interest in the Annunciation and the role of Gabriel in the drama of human salvation. And the celebration of a given saint's feast day might evoke the story of angels escorting the soul of Dives to heaven as narrated in Luke 16.

Juxtaposing medieval writings from disparate sources with selections from those of the patristic era makes it possible to develop a coherent picture of the diverse contexts and doctrines constituting medieval angelological exegesis. Largely because of the continuity between patristic and medieval readings, medieval exegesis can be seen as "coherent" in that most theologians, even when they disagree, are asking similar questions within similar frameworks. Moreover, with the exception of certain expositions of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels, there are relatively few major disagreements or controversies on these issues (by contrast there were vehement arguments and even formal ecclesiastical condemnations over questions of angelic nature and metaphysics). The picture is not fully complete in any one author (or at any one time), but when studied together, medieval views of the angels of Scripture appear as a coherent whole.

For two reasons, Bonaventure's body of writings provide perhaps the best single source for organizing the reconstruction and synthesis of how Christians throughout the medieval period would have understood the length of angelology. First, his era witnessed a blossoming of devotional habits and opportunities for the laity, and as a member of an order of preachers, he was particularly responsible for preaching on angels on a regular basis to a wide range of audiences. Second, and perhaps more important, as exegetes the Franciscans were particularly trained in the study of the literal, historical reading of the entire Bible. Whereas the exegetes of previous centuries and indeed other religious habits would have been relatively more interested in exploring the allegorical dimensions of the angels of Scripture, Bonaventure and his colleagues were keenly focused on the literal presence of the angels in biblical narratives.[3]

Two elements of their training led the Parisian Franciscans to place a great emphasis on the literal meaning of Scripture and of angels. First, under the influence of Aristotelian epistemology, thirteenth-century exegetes on the whole tended to

stress the importance of the literal, historical meaning. According to Aristotle, higher spiritual realities could be known only through sensible objects. (Consequently, for those following Aristotle, the Letter would give life to the Spirit.) Second, following Francis's recovery of the literal Christ, the Franciscans tended to place an even greater emphasis on a literal reading of Scripture. As the imitation of the historical Jesus became more important, so did the literal meaning of the entire Bible. Thus the Franciscan school in Paris required that the initial training in Scripture was to be a literal reading of the Bible. Moreover, whereas previous decades of biblical teaching had focused on individual books of Scripture, the friars renewed the practice of teaching the Bible whole or in large parts. Salimbene de Adam, for example, a Franciscan and near-contemporary of the Seraphic Doctor, boasted of Brother Bartholomaeus Anglicus, "who lectured on the literal meaning of the entire Bible at Paris."[4] Thus, when he was a student, a *baccalaureus biblicus* from 1248 to 1250, Bonaventure presented a literal reading of all of Scripture. Such a reading, called *cursorie*, required him to comment briefly on Scripture's literal meaning. His academic training led him to encounter and consider all the angels of Scripture from the cherub guarding the gates of Paradise (Gen. 3:24) to the angels of the Apocalypse. And as part III of this book will make clear, the keen Franciscan interest in the angels of Scripture, particularly those of the Apocalypse, was both a cause of and response to a series of crises threatening their order's very existence. Because of his particular Franciscan training and vocation, the Seraphic Doctor's angelological corpus adumbrates both the patristic reading of the literal significance of the angels in the biblical narratives and the ongoing but scattered witness to these angelic roles in the earlier medieval centuries. From the vantage point of his writings, then, it is possible to look back on the terrain of earlier writers, to discover continuities, discontinuities, and the emergence of new developments and emphases in medieval angelological exegesis.

As the literal narrative of the Bible, the length of Scripture, is the history of the cosmos from creation until the final blast of the trumpet, the length of angelology is the story of the angels' roles and appearances in this narrative. For medieval Christianity, this constitutes the fundamental framework for understanding what angels are and what they do. Seeing how the angels are related to this history in medieval life and thought requires a somewhat artificial division of this narrative into six periods: the creation, confirmation, and fall of the angels; the time before the presentation of the Law to Moses; the era of the Law from Moses to Christ; the Incarnation; the era of the church (from the Resurrection of Christ till the end of time); and the Last Judgment and the end of all things. Each of these periods is marked by special characteristics in the evolving relationship between God and humanity, and in each of these periods angels play distinctive roles and exhibit particular features. Because the events of the first period were so important in defining the characteristics of the celestial spirits, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to the creation, confirmation, and fall of the angels. The medieval understanding of the remaining five periods will be discussed in chapter 2.

The Creation and Fall: Controversies and Orthodox Consensus

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The first book of Moses begins with the account of God's creation of the cosmos and every creature in and on the celestial and terrestrial orbs. The Christian investigation of these creative acts constitutes one of the most intricate and refined aspects of angelology. From the patristic era through the medieval period, the roles of the spirits in the Genesis creation story were frequently explored.[5] Aquinas dedicates three *quaestiones* of the *Summa Theologiae* to the topic. Over half of the sections devoted to angels in Bonaventure's *Breviloquium* and *Commentary on the Sentences* examine the details of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels. Similarly, Dante devotes much of canto XXIX of the *Paradiso* to these subjects. The frequent iconographic depictions of the creation in stone or illuminations, the dramatization of the events on the medieval stage, and even heretical conflicts, however, are reminders that although the scholastics explored the intricacies of the creation in the greatest detail, these doctrines and narratives belonged to all of Christendom. Indeed, these subjects informed the entire life of the church, as a liturgical writer such as John Beleth reveals when he discusses the relationship between the creation and fall of the angels and the place of their Mass in the weekly cycle of votive Masses.[6]

The three events of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels transpired within the space of an instant, yet they constitute the essential point of departure for understanding the angels, their characteristics, and what their functions might be. Theologians extensively investigated these first moments of the angels, because of the kinship between angels and humans. Of all God's creatures, human beings are nearest to the angels, and angelology thus promises to illuminate anthropology. In the modern world, the impulse to learn about human nature from closely related beings has shifted subjects from seraphim to simians. Whereas modern scientists study the origins of the apes to uncover clues about humanity, medieval theologians investigated angels.

Even when theologians disagreed with him, Augustine's interpretation of the creation and the first moments of angelic existence, and his own synthesis of much of patristic angelology, provided the framework for the medieval Christian's understanding of these issues. In Books XI and XII of the *City of God* and in his *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine explored the creation event and the details of the creation, fall, and confirmation of the angels. Indeed, the entire second half of the *City of God* is an explication of the history of this City, a city comprised of both saints and angels. Questions important to medieval theologians, such as the issues of whether, when, and where the angels were created had been raised by him, as had the reasons for the fall of the evil angels and the knowledge, attributes, and soteriological potential of angels and demons before and after the fall. The refutation of some of Origen's teachings concerning the angels, their fall, and possible redemption, which was central to many medieval theological agendas, also had a precedent in Augustine. (It should be noted that many of Origen's teachings—such as his affirmation of angels both as protectors of nations and as individual guardian angels—were well within the mainstream

of orthodox angelology.) Augustine's views and the patristic consensus were transmitted to the Middle Ages both directly and by theologians such as Tajon of Saragossa whose seventh-century *Sentences* collated the works of Augustine, Gregory the Great, and others.

As Augustine was well aware, Genesis does not provide certain details concerning the creation that would have facilitated Christian angelology. In particular, Genesis seems to remain silent on the question of the divine creation of the angels. In stark contrast to its explicit references to other creatures, the Genesis account apparently says nothing of the angels' coming into being. The questions of whether, when, where, and how remained completely open for speculation. Thus Augustine declares, "[I]t is not plainly said [in Scripture] whether or when the angels were created; but if mention of them is made, it is implicitly under the name of 'heaven' . . . or perhaps under the name of 'light.'"[7] In adopting this interpretation of Genesis, the bishop of Hippo was following the lead of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.–ca. A.D. 50), a Hellenized Jewish exegete and philosopher, who had interpreted the "heavens and earth" as the creation of the spirits.[8] Traditional presentations of the creation follow this interpretation and include the creation of the angels on the first day. Thus, an early-thirteenth-century decorated manuscript presents the creation of the angels in the first of the six circles of creation.[9]

In both the patristic era and the Middle Ages, the apparent silence of Genesis exacerbated the problematics of the orthodox view of the creation of the angels and related doctrines. These subjects constituted something of a battlefield between Christians and several different types of non-Christians—philosophers, Gnostic and Cathar dualists, and even pagan magicians. The question of the creation of the angels was problematic for Philo and the church Fathers primarily because several schools of pagan philosophy advocated doctrines concerning uncreated spirits that somehow mediated between God and the corporeal creation.[10] Aristotle's spirits were eternal and uncreated (as was the universe itself). The Neoplatonists' scheme of emanations from the divine as the source of eternally uncreated spiritual beings provided these philosophers with angellike spirits who were the real creators of the universe. In addition to the philosophers, the Gnostics of the patristic era also saw the angels and their own peculiar beings, the aeons, as participating in the creation. Their God was quite removed from the created, material universe, which the Gnostics regarded as evil. Seeking to avoid the problem of theodicy with regard to an obviously imperfect creation, they ascribed to the angels and aeons the role of creator. The spirits, understood as angels or aeons or both, were themselves uncreated; they eternally proceeded or emanated from God. In the patristic era, then, the Neoplatonists and Gnostics were the primary opponents to the orthodox doctrine of God as sole creator of the entire universe. As early as the second century, Irenaeus writes against heretics who claim that angels created the world.[11] Out of these debates, the early church asserted "the doctrine of God as Creator unequivocal."[12] In 325, the two hundred plus bishops who met at Nicea to address the crisis of the Arians made the first major church pronouncement concerning angels. The prelates did not even refer to the angels by name. They declared the church's belief in God, "the maker of heaven