
“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

We can see: although there is no unanimous agreement in the theological tradition about the coordination of the four living beings to the four evangelists, still there is a kind of consensus that some such relationship must exist.

3. The greatest story ever told

The failure of theological tradition to come to a complete consensus on the question is not really surprising and underscores two facts. First of all, while man, endowed with the light of reason, can *definitely* come to know the truth, it does not follow that his unaided reason can know the *definitive* truth in every instance. Secondly, the angels in Scripture are not revealing truths about themselves, but about the economy of salvation which focuses on Christ. The angel, e.g., came to Manoah not for his own honor, but that we learn to offer our sacrifice to the Lord (cf. Jgd 6,17-18. 16). Light is shed on their own person and mission only secondarily, and this explains the divergence in theological traditions. God sends his heavenly ministers down to help lead man to Christ the source and sacrament of salvation; in the transmission of Divine revelation they helped the sacred authors write the greatest story ever told, the life of the Son of God Who became man!

4. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood

In a smaller dimension, we too are called to present the life of Jesus every day, by words, and even more so by deeds, by the testimony of our life. We can trust that God, in His mercy, does not give us such responsibility without providing for special angelic help. It is not so important to know who inspires us. Important is that we ask for help when we read Sacred Scripture and meditate upon it, when we pray and prepare to preach about.

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CHRIST’S PRIESTS UNITED WITH THE HOLY ANGELS IN THE CHURCH

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Association of Priests In Opus Angelorum®

Revelation: “The law - delivered by angels” (Acts 7:53) Vol. XVII, Nov. 2011

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

The Magisterium bases its teaching of the faith on Divine revelation. This, of course, is also true for the doctrine on the angels. Revelation, however, “the Gospel was handed on in two ways: orally... (and) in writing” (CCC 76), that is through Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition, because we “were taught by (Paul), either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Ts 2:15). Nevertheless, to go the secure way, the Church always verified Tradition with written Revelation, that is, with Sacred Scripture. As Holy Tradition was accepted, what can also be found in Scripture, explicit or implicitly, literally or according its meaning (cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 29-47). Therefore let us go back to Scripture and now see what God revealed about the holy angels in the New Testament.

1. Explicit and implicit presence of the angels

Before we search for single words and references, it needs to be stated generally that almost all revelation involves the ministry of the holy angels. This, of course, does not exclude the immediacy of the divine action, nor the role of the sacred writers. It is a question of “team work”. The preaching of Christ is His own work, but the fact that it has been handed down to us in the holy gospels, presupposes the collaborative actions of other individuals working in harmony with the Holy Spirit. The same holds true for the testimony of the apostles ... Those who transmitted the faith orally or in writing acted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whose servants the holy angels are. The Church tells us: Those who handed the gospel down orally “had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit”, and those who did it in writing did so “under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit” (CCC 76). The inspiration, action of the Holy Spirit, does not, *a priori*, preclude the ministry of an angel. The first verse of the Apocalypse is paradigmatic in this regard: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants,... and communicated *it* by His angel to His servant John” (Rev 1,1). Revelation comes from God, given to Christ, communicated to John,

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the human author; but it came to him via an angel. All collaborate in this communication of divine revelation.

a) “The law - delivered by angels”

Looking into Scripture we read: St. Stephen, accused the religious leaders of the Jewish people, does not so much defend himself in his speech but rather indicts them that they have not just rejected human reasoning, but angelic guidance: “You stiff-necked people, ... you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you ... you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” (Acts 7:51,53).

b) “He rode on a cherub”

This faith is based in different facts of the Old Testament. Let’s recall just two: The Ten Commandments, from where the Chosen People got its wisdom, were given by God, and in the very concrete form of the “tables of stone”: The Lord “gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Ex 31:18). It was to this that Stephen referred, when speaking of the mediating angels.

The other reference is that of the four Living Beings, seen especially by the prophet Ezequiel: “As I looked, behold,... from the midst of (the fire) came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: each had four faces,... each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back” (Ez 1:4-6,10).

c) “he heard things that cannot be told”

We might recall here also, what we read in the *Compendium* of the *Catechism*: “The angels are energetic and tireless messengers who connect heaven and earth. Between God and mankind there is not silence or a lack of communication but a continual conversation, a ceaseless personal exchange” (in explanation of the picture of the angels at the end; ed. USCCB, page 178). St. Paul experienced the angelic mediation of the word: “I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven ... and he heard things that cannot be told” (2 Cor 12:2-4). As the good angels, so too the fallen ones may offer man false revelations, a fact which can be verified by the contradiction to authentic revelation: “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8-9).

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2. The four Living Beings and the four Gospels

The different characteristics of the Cherubim’s relationship with God (cf. Ex 25:22; 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:9-11 etc.) reminds us that the angels are servants and companions of the Divine Word; hence, their multiple presence at the incarnation of the Son of God. It led the tradition to relate the four Living Beings with the four Gospels (cf. Comment of the *Jerusalem Bible* on Ez 1:10). There are four Beings and somehow just one, as there is just one life of Jesus and yet described in four gospels. Their fourfold face, which looks in four directions, symbolizes the mission given by Jesus to the apostles to announce the Gospel to the entire World (cf. Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15,20).

a) The most common attribution

Already in his inaugural lecture as Bachelor in Sacred Scripture, 1252, Saint Thomas Aquinas presents the division of the four gospels according the mystery of Christ and adds the relation to one of the four Living Beings (cf. “De commendatione et partione sacrae scripturae”).

In his collection of the Church Fathers’ comments on Scripture, the *Catena Aurea* (Preface to the Gospel according to St. Matthew), St. Thomas cites different fathers of the Church with the same position: The face of Man is related with St. Matthew because of he relates more the Incarnation and human morals; for St. Mark’s influence by the Lion was related to the Divine Power and resurrection described by him; St. Luke would be related to the Calf also by his accenting the Passion, sacrifice and priesthood while St. John’s influence by the Eagle because of the sacraments of His Divinity and the miracles of the Divine *Resurrection*.

b) Different attributions

While the aforementioned attribution is widely held in tradition, it is not exclusive. Saint Augustine assigns the four Beings in a different fashion: “Matthew who has chiefly represented the *regal* character of Christ, is designated by a Lion; Luke by a Calf, because of the *Priest’s victim*; Mark, who chose neither to relate the *royal* nor the priestly lineage, and yet is clearly busied about His human nature, is designated by the figure of a Man. These three animals, the Lion, the Man, the Calf, walk on the earth, whence these three Evangelists are mostly employed about things which Christ wrought in the flesh. But John, as the Eagle, soars on high, and with most keen eyes of the heart beholds the light of unchangeable Truth. From which we may understand, that the other three Evangelists are occupied about the active, and John about the contemplative, life.”