

GANZ NOTES TO SHARE - TNS 14, 3 - St. Augustine: Angels and the Process of History

THE SOLEMNITY OF ST JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY, 19 March 2024

See: <https://www.lorettochapel.com/our-story>

Our Story begins in 1850 when the Vicariate of New Mexico was established under the first Bishop of the Territory, Bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy. Seeing a need to educate the girls of the Territory, Bishop Lamy sent a plea to Catholic teaching orders to open a school for girls. The Sisters of Loretto responded and sent six sisters to open the Loretto Academy. Having been recently under Mexican rule, the Territory of New Mexico was full of Spanish-speaking citizens, so the six had to learn the Spanish language and, after an arduous trip during which the Mother Superior died, finally arrived in Santa Fe and opened their school in 1853.

By 1873, the Sisters were able to start the construction of a Chapel. Using the same French architect and builders as Saint Francis Cathedral Basilica, the Chapel of Our Lady of Light (as it was then known) was patterned after Archbishop Lamy's favorite Sainte Chapelle in Paris. With its gothic-style architecture, the Chapel certainly would have stood out among the small adobe homes surrounding it at the time.

Unfortunately, the architect died before access to the choir loft was built. Given the height of the loft and the small size of the Chapel, a staircase would have taken up too much floor space, thereby reducing the seating capacity to an unacceptably small level. Legend states that seeking guidance and help, the Sisters of Loretto prayed a nine day [novena to St. Joseph](#), Patron Saint of Carpenters. A novena is a special prayer said for nine consecutive days. On the final day of the novena, a carpenter appeared with only a hammer and carpenter's square. He built what is now known as the [Miraculous Staircase](#) with simple tools and wooden pegs. The rare wood is not native to the American Southwest. When the Staircase was complete, it is said that the carpenter disappeared without receiving thanks or payment. The Sisters tried all local lumber stores but could not find accounts open for supplies for their stairs. Some believe the carpenter was St. Joseph himself while others believe that it was someone sent by St. Joseph. What is known is that the Sisters of Loretto prayed, and their prayers were answered.



BIOGRAPHICAL

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church at "Augustine" -

Augustine's influence on the course of subsequent theology has been immense. It moulded that of the W. Church in the early Middle Ages, and even the reaction against Augustinianism with the gradual rediscovery of *Aristotle by the 13th cent. was less complete than has often been supposed. The Reformers appealed to

elements of Augustine's teaching in their attack on the *Schoolmen, and later the *Jansenists invoked his authority. It is still one of the most potent elements in W. religious thought.

Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad, 2004)

August 28 St. Augustine Bishop of Hippo, Doctor of the Church (354–430 CE)

—

Late have I learned to love you,
Beauty, at once so ancient and so new!
Late have I come to love You!
You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. . . .
You were with me, but I was not with You.

St. Augustine was one of the great architects of Western thought. In the vast library of his written works he left his mark on virtually every aspect of Christian doctrine. As the bishop of Hippo in the Roman province of North Africa he was a regular hammer of orthodoxy. Indeed his engagement in a succession of bitter controversies provided the occasion and motive for much of his work. **The exception was his greatest and most personal work, his autobiographical *Confessions*. If he left no other legacy, this book alone would mark him as one of the most significant figures in the history of Christian spirituality. For St. Augustine was the first Christian to regard human experience—notably his own life story—as the fit starting point for reflecting on God.** The word “confession” has two meanings. Both the confession of guilt and the confession of faith are implied in the title of Augustine's memoirs. In this work he reflected on the meaning of his life in light of his most pivotal turning point: his conversion and baptism in the Catholic church. **In this light he was able to discern the providential hand of God, caring for him and guiding him toward his eventual happiness, even in those times when the thought of God was far from him.**

Augustine was baptized by St. Ambrose of Milan in 387 CE. His mother lived to see this great day but died soon after. Alone in the world, Augustine returned to North Africa with the hope of pursuing a monastic life. In 391 CE, however, he was pressed by the local church to be ordained. Four years later, much against his will, he was chosen to be the bishop of Hippo. He remained in that post for thirty-five years until his death in 430 CE.

From Pope Francis I - Apostolic Letter *Scripturae Sacrae affectus* on the sixteen hundred anniversary of the death of Saint Jerome (30 September 2020)

"As a result, **Saint Jerome [347-420 CE]** became one of the great figures of the ancient Church in the period known as the golden age of patristics. He served as a bridge between East and West. A youthful friend of **Rufinus of Aquileia [345-410 CE]**, he knew Ambrose and was frequently in correspondence with Augustine. In the East, he knew Gregory of Nazianzus, Didymus the Blind and Epiphanius of Salamis. **The Christian iconographic tradition presents him [St. Jerome], in the company of Augustine [354-430 CE], Ambrose [349-397 CE] and Gregory the Great [540-604 CE], as one of the four great Doctors of the Western Church."**

Pamela Bright -

His extraordinary persistence in grappling with the challenge of Scripture within the life of the church was once more demonstrated in the opening years of the 5th cent. as he tackled the *Literal Meaning of Genesis* (401–415). The Bible is omnipresent throughout his immense literary output in the next three decades, with hundreds of sermons, letters, and apologetic works against Manichees, Donatists, and Pelagians, as well as in his monumental theological works, *City of God* and *On the Trinity*. **These works reveal a man who knows the Scriptures by heart. Indeed, what characterizes Augustine as a biblical interpreter is the fusion of an exuberant ministry as preacher, writer, and controversialist, together with an intense introspection into the transformative dynamics of God's word so powerfully evident throughout the *Confessions*.**^[1]

PURITY OF HEART/MIND

"Purity of heart is to will one thing."
– Søren Kierkegaard

This saying by Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish theologian and philosopher, suggests that **a mind divided is a mind unable to be at peace with itself**. When we desire contradictory ends there is no chance for the mind to find harmony; always there is inner strife, conflict, and confusion. **When the mind pulls in two directions at once we inevitably suffer; we are forever restless, dissatisfied, and second-guessing ourselves.**

To will one thing means to have a mind that is unified around an organizing principle that gives our lives meaning and purpose. I believe that we all attempt to find such an organizing principle. We choose one thing that is, for us, the most important thing in our lives. This focus determines our priorities so that we can make choices, aim at "willing one thing," and thereby escape from inner conflict.
^[2]

St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XI, Chapter 7: Most appropriately, therefore, when prophetic authority tells us that God rested, it signifies the rest of those who are at rest in him and to whom he himself gives rest. And this prophecy also applies to the people to whom it speaks and for whose sake it was written, promising them that they themselves, after the good works which God performs in them and through them, will have eternal rest in God if they have first drawn near to him in some manner in this life through faith.^[3]

The reason I use this quote from Augustine is to get to the idea of how a person, like the Divine Persons, can be perfectly "at rest" while being utterly and fully exercising one's powers. What I learned years ago in Lonergan's *Verbum* articles: the meaning of *actus purus*.

ANGELS ARE LED INTERNALLY, NOT EXTERNALLY

As I wrote in my *Rewilding the Word* #7 (March 2024), in relation to a comment by Didymus the Blind on Psalm 23: "Didymus argues that this Psalm describes a development of the soul from always needing to be attended to by God (Jeremiah 31:31 – "I took them by the hand to lead them") – to becoming a soul so familiar with God and God's ways that it can lead itself (virtue) – a soul now mature and deeply conformed to God. This is what it means to "walk in the paths of righteousness". As Jesus insisted, "I do nothing on my own; I only do what the Father tells me." ... **A shepherd leads from the outside; virtue leads a person from his or her inside. The latter is the goal**, what St. Ignatius of Loyola means by "always growing in devotion", which is another way of expressing what he means by "finding God in all things."

TWO HISTORIES

St. Augustine and the "city of God ... city of man" – During the years of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine was also engaged in writing a massive vindication of Christianity against pagan critics who held that the abandonment of the old gods was responsible for the sack of Rome in 410. The 22 books of *The City of God* appeared in instalments (416–22). **The old Republic had been sordid and its religion trivial, and its gods had not delivered the human happiness and order they promised.** Augustine then discussed the State under a Christian emperor. He disapproved of torture and capital punishment, though conceding that judges had to punish criminals to protect society; slavery was a symptom of humanity's fallen estate, and in a violent world the Church was called to represent forgiveness and humanity. **But the city of God is an otherworldly society towards which one can struggle now** by

restraining injustice, but which is realized beyond this life. The two 'cities', earthly and heavenly, are distinct.^[4]

What I mean to show here is that "history" is not sitting "out there". History is the effort of a person to give an account of *what really happened*, or *what is centrally significant*, in a specific frame of Time.

Acts of the Apostles 1: **Prologue**¹ In my earlier work,^a Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning*² until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit,^b and was taken up to heaven.^{c*}^[5]

Even though there are countless accounts claiming authority, there exist really only two accounts: what LOVE did (the City of God) and what UNLOVE did (the City of Man).

The heart of Augustine's religion is seen in his *Tractates on St John's Gospel*, his *Sermons*, esp. on the Psalms, and his *Rule* for monks and nuns (see following entry). **These express not only his spirituality, the yearning (*desiderium*) for God which for him is the hallmark of authentic faith, but also his profound sense of the ecclesial community, the body which with Christ as its head is the *totus Christus*.** No scandal is bad enough to make anyone right to leave it. Exegesis of Scripture became increasingly important to Augustine.^[6]

BERNARD LONERGAN, SJ ON "HISTORY"

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "history" – **I.1.a. - Old English** – A written narrative constituting a continuous chronological record of important or public events (esp. in a particular place) or of a particular trend, institution, or person's life. Common in the titles of books. Strictly speaking, a **history** is a work in which each movement, action, or chain of events is dealt with as a whole and pursued to its natural termination or to a convenient stopping place, as distinct from **annals**, in which events are simply recorded in divisions of a year or other limited period, or a **chronicle**, in which events are presented as a straightforward continuous narrative.

The word 'history' is employed in two senses. There is history (1) that is written about, and there is history (2) that is written. History (2) aims at expressing knowledge of history (1). **The precise object of historical inquiry and the precise nature of historical investigation are matters of not a little obscurity.** This is not because there are no good historians. It is not because good historians

have not by and large learnt what to do. It is mainly because historical knowledge is an instance of knowledge, and few people are in possession of a satisfactory cognitional theory.

It is in this field of meaningful speech and action that the historian is engaged. It is not, of course, the historian's but the exegete's task to determine *what was meant*. **The historian envisages a quite different object. He is not content to understand what people meant. He wants to grasp *what was going forward in particular groups at particular places and times*.** By 'going forward' I mean to exclude the mere repetition of a routine. **I mean the change that originated the routine and its dissemination. I mean process and development but, no less, decline and collapse.**

In literary terms history is concerned with **the drama of life**, with what results through the characters, their decisions, their actions, and not only because of them but also because of their defects, their oversights, their failures to act. In brief, where exegesis is concerned to determine what a particular person meant, history is concerned to determine what, in most cases, contemporaries do not know. **For, in most cases, contemporaries do not know *what is going forward***, first, because experience is individual while the data for history lie in the experiences of many; secondly, because the actual course of events results not only from what people intend but also from their oversights, mistakes, failures to act; thirdly, because history does not predict what will happen but reaches its conclusions from what has happened; and fourthly, because history is not merely a matter of gathering and testing all available evidence but also involves **a number of interlocking discoveries that bring to light the significant issues and operative factors.**

cent. century.

cent. century

[1] Pamela Bright, "Augustine," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009) 349.

[2] <https://www.wildmind.org/blogs/quote-of-the-month/kierkegaard-purity-of-heart>.

[3] Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. 7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012–2013), 9.

[4] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* at entry "Augustine".

* Lk 1:1–4

* 1:22 • Mt 28:19–20; Lk 24:49, 51; 1 Tm 3:16; 10:40–41; 13:31; Mt 28:10

[5] *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Ac 1:1–2.

[6] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.*

AUGUSTINE, THE CITY OF GOD, BOOK XI - a beginning sample of a much longer text

From these testimonies and others like them—it would take too long to list them all—we have learned that there is **a city of God**, and we have **longed** to become citizens of that city by virtue of the love that its founder has inspired in us. ... In contrast, the citizens of **the earthly city prefer** their own gods to the founder of this holy city. They do not know that he is the God of gods—not of false gods, that is, impious and arrogant gods, who, because they are deprived of his immutable light which is common to all and are therefore reduced to a kind of impoverished power, strive somehow to amass private powers for themselves and seek divine honors from their deluded subjects. He is rather the God of pious and holy gods, who delight in submitting themselves to one rather than having many submit to them and in **worshiping God rather than being worshiped in place of God.** [1]

John 3:

17 For God sent his Son into the world
not to judge the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved.*

18 No one who believes in him will be judged;
but whoever does not believe is judged already,
because that person does not believe
in the Name of God's only Son.^{k*}

19 And the judgement is this:
though the light has come into the world
**people have preferred
darkness to the light**
because their deeds were evil.*

20 And indeed, everybody who does wrong
hates the light and avoids it,
to prevent his actions from being shown up;*

21 but whoever does the truth^l
comes out into the light,

so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God.^{!*}[2]

The Oxford English Dictionary at "**to prefer**" – **II.4. - a1393** – *transitive*. To favour (one person or thing) in preference or to another; to like better. Also: to choose rather, tend to choose (with infinitive or *that*-clause as

object). Frequently with adverbial phrase stating explicit comparison.
Also *intransitive*. Now the usual sense.

And first I shall indicate how these two cities took their origins in a prior division among the angels. [3]

Rather he speaks by means of the truth itself, if anyone is capable of **hearing him with the mind instead of the body**. For here he speaks to that part of man which is better than everything else of which a man consists and than which only God himself is better.² [4]

I think that what Augustine means here is that if one tries to “see” or to “visualize” what a non-corporeal being is— an Angel – then he or she will never get to them. One must *understand* what an Angel is, to defeat a “picture-thinking” habit of humans.

For, since man is most rightly understood—or, if this is not possible, at least most rightly believed—to be made in the image of God,³ he undoubtedly stands nearer to God, above him, by virtue of that part of him [Intellect] by which he himself surpasses those lower parts which he has in common with the beasts. [5]

[1] Saint Augustine, [*The City of God*](#), ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. 7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012–2013), 2.

* 1:1a; 4:34+

* 2 Co 5:19; 4:42n; 12:47; Ac 4:12

* 8:12b

* Jb 24:13–17; Ep 5:13

* Mt 5:14–16

[2] [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Jn 3:17–21.

[3] Saint Augustine, [*The City of God*](#), ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. 7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012–2013), 2.

^{*2} I.e., the mind (*mens*) is better than anything but God himself. See vol. 1, p. 336, n. 128.

[4] Saint Augustine, [*The City of God*](#), ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. 7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012–2013), 2.

^{*3} See Gn 1:26.

[5] Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. 7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012–2013), 3.

“ANGELS” BY BOB HURD

Michael Downey, [*The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*](#) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 38–41.

Angels

Angels in one form or another are found in most religions of the world, but most prominently in religions of the book, such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Whether as messengers, companions, guardians, guides, overseers, or members of the heavenly court, they assist the divine-human encounter, while their malevolent counterparts, demons or fallen angels, hinder it.

Angels appear under all these guises in both the OT and the NT. Modern scriptural exegesis and the comparative study of religions afford us perspectives that were not available to patristic and medieval theology and piety. In light of these perspectives, a contemporary understanding of the angels for the life of faith needs to be both appreciative and suspicious of the patristic-medieval elaboration of the biblical sources. On the one hand, the basic idea that one creature can be a vehicle of God’s gracious presence to another lies at the heart of Christianity. There is no good reason, either philosophical or theological, for thinking that angels could not serve as companions to the rest of creation in the realization of a new heaven and a new earth. On the other hand, patristic and medieval thought undoubtedly understood angels in ways which were more Neoplatonic than biblical and which in practice, if not in theory, threatened the centrality of Christ as well as the religious agency of the human person. These initial remarks can be elaborated in three additional observations.

First, where angelic mediation between God and humanity is presented in the Bible, it follows patterns derived from external sources. The angelology of the OT is heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism; that of the NT reflects the gnosticism and apocalyptic

OT Old Testament

NT New Testament

OT Old Testament

NT New Testament

thought that grew up alongside later Judaism and early Christianity. The Bible in part imbibed and in part revised these angelologies from surrounding religions and cultures. Consequently, while angels are certainly in the Bible and therefore *in* revelation, it is no longer obvious that their existence is a content *of* revelation, as Roman Catholicism has traditionally maintained. The Bible assumes rather than asserts their existence, much as it assumes ancient astronomical views; and assuming their existence, its real interest is to assert a correct understanding of their place in the economy of salvation.

The few official teachings of Roman Catholicism on this subject follow the same pattern. These teachings, such as that of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, assert that God created the angels (as well as all other creatures) and that they were created good. Read out of context, such statements appear to make the existence of angels binding official teaching, and some theologians continue to interpret them in this way. Read in context, however, it becomes clear that the real point of such statements is to assert that all beings other than God are created and that evil has a finite, creaturely origin rather than an origin in God. Thus there is room for legitimate differences of opinion about what these teachings intend to clarify and what they require of the believer.

A second and related point is that the place of angels in the biblical economy of salvation is a relatively peripheral one. Though generally an unquestioned part of the worldview of the Scriptures, the role of angels is greatly relativized by God's self-communication via *human* intermediaries such as the patriarchs, the law and the prophets, Christ and the Church. In contrast to Neoplatonism, which was such a formative force on patristic and medieval angelology, the Bible does not present angels as necessary mediators of the divine-human covenant, as though God's transcendence made a direct approach to humanity impossible. The great temptation of angelology and of every theology of mediation is to imagine that the transcendence of God introduces a gap between God and creatures that must be bridged by a "go-between," whether this be Christ, the angels, a hierarchy, or a sacramental system. This Neoplatonic supposition overlooks the fact that God's transcendence is precisely what makes for God's immanence, both as Creator and in the self-communication that is grace. Even an orthodox Christology cannot understand Christ, the mediator par excellence, as a go-between reality; rather, in Christ the direct presence of God to all creation, and particularly human reality, reaches its supreme expression.

Beneath the surface of distorting Neoplatonic suppositions, patristic-medieval speculation also preserved the original biblical view. Indeed, the tasks the Fathers assigned the angels are transparently those belonging either to the Trinity in its direct gracious presence to human persons or to Christians themselves in their ministry to one another. These tasks range from inner enlightenment of the soul to ministries of the ecclesial community, such as guiding catechumens through the process of initiation. On the whole, then, the angels of the Bible are not so much intermediaries as accompaniments to the divine-human partnership, a position that emerges in polemical

response to other views assigning a more decisive role to the angels. This is what lies behind Paul's eloquent statement in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—the religious agency of the human subject is not to be alienated by higher intermediary powers.

But the potential for religious alienation perceived by Paul remained. As the Church became more hierarchical in the succeeding centuries and the people who comprised it were themselves ranked in lower and higher orders, angelology took on a similarly rigid hierarchical pattern. A striking parallelism can be discerned here between the mediating functions of the clergy and those of the angels, who were sometimes pictured in priestly garb. As the clergy evolved into a supposedly higher order possessing powers to intercede for the lower and now religiously powerless laity, so too angels were increasingly seen as mediators on behalf of humanity. Theoretically, these mediating functions, angelic and priestly, were subordinated to the one mediating priesthood of Christ—a priesthood in which all baptized believers supposedly have a share.

In practice, however, this exaggerated emphasis upon hierarchy and mediation resulted in an increasingly passive and disempowered laity. It also gave rise to angelism, a distorted view of holiness that continues to plague authentic Christian spirituality to this day. Angelism, which has taken many different forms in the history of the Church, pits spirit against matter and turns legitimate differences and tensions into oppositions. The this-worldly is depreciated in favor of the other-worldly, the temporal is depreciated in favor of the eternal, activism and political responsibility are eschewed in favor of withdrawal from the world, celibacy becomes the ideal and sexual activity a fall into imperfection and sin. This distortion takes ecclesial form in the assignment of all material-temporal matters to the laity, with the implication that these are religiously inferior. Spiritual functions are reserved for a much smaller class of religiously serious people, i.e., clergy and religious.

Vatican II's call for the full and active participation of the faithful inaugurated a reassessment of this disenfranchisement of the ordinary believer in all areas of Church life. As the priesthood of all believers is reasserted and faith as a whole becomes more Christ-centered, the relevance of mediating higher powers (saints, angels, and even Mary) for spirituality recedes more and more into the background. This need not be interpreted as a lack of faith or inattention to tradition; it should rather be seen as a legitimate corrective to imbalances in past theologies and spiritualities.

Finally, "angel" is a much more fluid and subtle symbol in Scripture than patristic and medieval angelology understood it to be. Traditional angelology fastened solely upon the interpretation of angel as an objectively distinct being situated between God and humanity. But this is only one of various shades of meaning in the biblical use of the

term. The “angel of Yahweh” from the early OT period, for example, sometimes appears as a distinct figure but sometimes is a circumlocution for God’s own gracious presence to the people. Similarly, the winged figures or cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision are explicitly presented as symbolic likenesses for an experience that cannot be literally described. These likenesses are not so much distinct beings as component parts of the one “appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (Ezek 1:28, RSV). That angels in Scripture are often ciphers or symbols of God’s own presence is borne out by the fact that the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the OT, often interpolates angels where the Hebrew original has God alone acting directly in human affairs.

If the biblical symbol “angel” sometimes stands for the divine pole in the divine-human encounter rather than an in-between being, it may likewise express the human pole, particularly the transcending possibilities of human spirit and freedom before God. Patristic theology made much of the ancient idea that there are two angels within each person, one of justice and one of wickedness, pulling the soul in opposite directions. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato had used similar language, describing the soul as a charioteer drawn by a team of winged horses, one good and the other evil. At a later stage this type of analysis evolved into “the discernment of spirits” and “the contemplation of the two standards” of Ignatian spirituality.

All such symbolisms record the lived experience of dynamisms within the human spirit that are in one sense this spirit itself and, in another sense, forces impinging upon the spirit from without. The ambiguity that these forces are the expression of one’s own freedom or agency and at the same time the impress of forces from without cannot be resolved in either direction without falsification. In this regard, the idea of angels as inner psychic forces that both express and impress the human spirit is analogous to God’s self-communication in grace.

Grace creates a choice – for or against community with God and neighbor. But grace is not a third thing or entity coming in between God and the human person, nor is it simply one of the two poles of the divine-human encounter. It is God in distinction from the human person (uncreated grace), and yet it is also the human person ratifying and actualizing the life of God within (created grace). In “Annunciation to the Shepherds from Above” from *The Life of Mary*, the poet Rilke captures this sense beautifully by connecting Mary’s complete and unconflicted openness to God with the angel who announces the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. The angel says: “What is a

OT Old Testament

RSV Revised Standard Version Bible

OT Old Testament

thornbush now: God feels his way into a virgin's womb. I am the ray thrown by her inwardness, which is your guide."

See also Christ; demon(s), demonic, devil(s); discernment of spirits; dualism; gnosis, gnosticism; grace; spirits.

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Bibliography: J. Daniélou, *The Angels and Their Mission*, trans. D. Heimann (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1982). G. MacGregor, *Angels: Ministers of Grace* (New York: Paragon House, 1988). K. Rahner, "On Angels," *God and Revelation*, Theological Investigations 18, trans. E. Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 235–274.

Bob Hurd¹

¹ Michael Downey, [*The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*](#) (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 38–41.

The City of God

The City of God, philosophical treatise vindicating Christianity, written by the medieval philosopher St. Augustine as *De civitate Dei contra paganos* (*Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*) about 413–426 CE. A masterpiece of Western culture, *The City of God* was written in response to pagan claims that the sack of Rome by barbarians in 410 was one of the consequences of the abolition of pagan worship by Christian emperors. Augustine responded by asserting, to the contrary, that Christianity saved the city from complete destruction and that Rome’s fall was the result of internal moral decay. He further outlined his vision of two societies, that of the elect (“The City of God”) and that of the damned (“The City of Man”). These “cities” are symbolic embodiments of the two spiritual powers—faith and unbelief—that have contended with each other since the fall of the angels. They are inextricably intermingled on this earth and will remain so until time’s end. Augustine also developed his theological interpretation of human history, which he perceives as linear and predestined, beginning with the Creation and ending with the Second Coming of Christ. At this work’s heart is a powerful contrarian vision of human life, one which accepts the place of disaster, death, and disappointment while holding out hope of a better life to come, a hope that in turn eases and gives direction to life in this world.

The City of God is divided into 22 books. The first 10 refute the claims to divine power of various pagan communities. The last 12 retell the biblical story of humankind from Genesis to the Last Judgment, offering what Augustine presents as the true history of the City of God, against which, and only against which, the history of the City of Man, including the history of Rome, can be properly understood. The work is too long and at times, particularly in the last books, too discursive to make entirely satisfactory reading today, but it remains impressive as a whole and fascinating in its parts. The stinging attack on paganism in the first books is memorable and effective; the encounter with Platonism in Books VIII–X is of great philosophical significance; and the last books (especially Book XIX, with a vision of true peace) offer a view of human destiny that would be widely persuasive for at least a thousand years. In a way, Augustine’s *The City of God* is (even

consciously) the Christian rejoinder to Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's imitation of Plato, his own *De republica*.

The City of God was one of the most influential works of the Middle Ages. It would be read in various ways, at some points virtually as a founding document for a political order of kings and popes that Augustine could hardly have imagined. Indeed, his famous theory that people need government because they are sinful served as a model for church-state relations in medieval times. He also influenced the work of St. Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin and many other theologians throughout the centuries.

James O'Donnell The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

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