

# TOWARD A THEOLOGY ON GUARDIAN ANGELS: ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH FATHERS: PART I—TO THE APOSTOLIC & CHURCH FATHERS

*Archpriest Nectarios Trevino*

*The title of this paper is deliberately chosen. The first word of the title—“toward”—has been used because this paper is not a definitive work. Rather it is intended to be an initial step, albeit a very modest one, toward a more significant effort on guardian angels. Therefore, please read the following article, Part 1 of 2, in light of this objective.*

Guardian angels, everyone seems to like them. Many believe in them. There are guardian angel books, lapel pins, statues and figurines, music, movies, drawings, and paintings. Sadly, today they are more a novelty and curiosity in the heart of man than a truth. And that is unfortunate.

We ought not to trivialize the subject of guardian angels. Today's commercialization of guardian angels is not reality. The trivialization of so critical a topic serves Satan's objectives.

Guardian angels are “companions of the faithful.”<sup>1</sup> Guardian angels are our “shepherds”<sup>2</sup> with us throughout every second, minute, and hour of every day of our lives. Next to God, our guardian angel knows us better than anyone in our lives since they are with us throughout our lives! Consequently, it would not be surprising to learn that our guardian angels exult in our spiritual growth. Similarly, they may weep at our spiritual failures.<sup>3</sup> We are never abandoned or alone. And this is important because man lives in a supernatural world—in “spiritual combat between the powers of light and the powers of darkness.”<sup>4</sup> One who believes in the Triune God must believe in angels. One who believes in angels must believe in guardian angels. The preceding two premises are not optional considerations. They go to the heart of our Orthodox Christianity.<sup>5</sup> It is within this context that this paper is offered.

## **Defining “Angel”**

The word “angel” originates from the Greek *angelos*, which means “messenger of God.” God created angels. They are: real living beings; supernatural; non-physical; may assume corporeal appearances; and their spirituality is above human experience. The existence of angels is accepted on faith. Knowledge of their existence comes from God, i.e., revelation. Angels have reason and freedom for forming personal moral decisions. As a consequence, angels have (*past tense*) sinned. Pseudo-Dionysius is credited for the theological groundwork on angelology.

The Creator is very active in His creation. And guardian angels are an essential part of His creation, and they have a role in our lives. Our guardian angel unites us with heaven, with God. We can, given our free will, ignore, misuse, abuse, and refuse our guardian angel. But we do so at our peril. Man requires a greater understanding and appreciation of the significance of guardian angels. This, then, is a framework—a theological beginning—for a doctrine on guardian angels and the role they play in our daily lives.

### The Earliest References

*“The angel who delivers me from all evils, bless these boys, and my name shall be called upon them, and the name of my fathers, Abraam and Isaac; and let them be increased to a great multitude on the earth.”*<sup>6</sup> St. Basil takes the angel in the foregoing verse from Genesis to refer to a guardian angel. Indeed not only Moses but also Isaiah<sup>7</sup> and Jeremiah<sup>8</sup> make references to guardian angels. Of this, Basil states that they know “the angels [are] to be set over men as tutors and guardians [and] calls them to witness.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, our initial theology of a guardian angel and the roles they play in our life stems from the Old Testament prophets.

In referring to the angel who “delivers me from all evils,” Moses attributes his guardian angel a saving, rescuing, or a positive guiding influence. It coincides with Basil’s attribution of the angel being a “guardian”—a protector and overseer, and a “mentor”—a counselor, teacher, and instructor. It is not unlike the role that Socrates ascribes to his guardian angel in Plato’s (ca. 427-347) recount of Socrates’ suicide in the *Phaedo*. The very fact that Socrates and Plato believed in angels—a concept that could not be empirically proven (a fundamental tenet of Platonic thought<sup>10</sup>)—meant they were relying on faith. And faith in Platonic thought, unlike Christian belief, was not a virtue. I cite Socrates and Plato because I believe it is essential to know that the concept of guardian angels existed outside the realm of Judaic belief. Indeed, the very idea of angels existed in Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The Holy Spirit’s influence is unbounded and affects non-Christians.

### The New Testament

The Christian concept of faith is a way of life.<sup>11</sup> Faith is trusting and believing in the Triune God and in those promises and creation He has given us. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>12</sup> The foundation of our faith—our trusting and believing in the existence of guardian angels—resides in the words of Jesus, wherein the Book of Matthew, He advises “See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.”<sup>13</sup> “Their angels” in this case means “their guardian angels.” And the guardian angels *always see the face of God*, not in His divine essence, but in His divine glory, His energies. We are learning from this passage, the words of our Saviour, that

the primary role of the guardian angel is to minister for those who may inherit salvation.<sup>14</sup> It is also important to note that the quotation of Jesus' words has no limiters, but holds for every person!<sup>15</sup> "This is a truth, that each man has an Angel."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Methodius, and Tertullian support the assessment that guardian angels are given to man at birth.<sup>17</sup>

*"They said to her, 'You are mad.' But she insisted that it was so. They said, 'It is his angel!' But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened, they saw him and were amazed."*<sup>18</sup> With this recounting by the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke, we receive an affirmation of Jesus' words (as also stated above in Matthew). In other words, the early Church in living its faith—its trust and belief in Jesus—is evincing two things: its belief in angels and its belief that angels are assigned to people as guardians. There can be no other logical explanation for St. Luke's words. Angels exist. Guardian angels exist. Even St. Peter had a guardian angel. So, too, do you—the reader—have a guardian angel.

The words of Luke depict a profound faith in God, the defining virtue of the Christian. We are told that faith in Christ is the one thing most pleasing to God; it is the "work of God" that we should believe in Christ.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we please God by acknowledging His angels and guardian angels. We must never forget that God offers us salvation by the means that are pleasing to Him. And an essential element of His creation is the angels and guardian angels, both of which are here to assist us.

### **The Apostolic & Church Fathers**

The following references to the Apostolic and Church Fathers will be minimal, given the limited scope of this study. Nevertheless, the authorities are of significance and value. It will become evident that there is a thread present in the Fathers' writings. The line begins with the Sicilian, Pantaenus<sup>20</sup>, a Stoic philosopher who converted to Christianity and became the head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt. Of Pantaenus, we know little, and of his teachings, we know less. He was an educated cosmopolitan, nevertheless instrumental in ensuring that the catechetical school was a success. And the metric of success is ascertainable by the students it produced. The first and most famous of Pantaenus' students was Clement of Alexandria<sup>21</sup>.

Clement of Alexandria is critical to angelology for the following reasons. It is from him that we receive the affirmation that "to know God...is the first step in faith...through confidence in the teaching of the Saviour." Clement continues, "all men are His," meaning all men are God's people. More importantly, he defines "all men" as "Greeks" and "Barbarians." What Clement is doing is universalizing the faith, much as St. Luke did in his gospel. And it is because of God's "dispensed... beneficence both to Greeks and Barbarians" that "the angels are distributed among the nations."<sup>22</sup> It

is essential to read “among the nations” as meaning *beyond the nation of Israel*. God’s church is a universal church, for all people who adhere to the “teaching of the Saviour.” That is why “angels are distributed among the nations.” And it will become evident that that is why every person will have a guardian angel, whether Greek or Barbarian.

Clement transcends the breadth of angelic responsibility from nations to the individual man. “[The spiritual man] prays in the society of angels...and he [man] is never out of their holy keeping.”<sup>23</sup> From this, it is evident that angelic participation with man is intimate and personal. Therefore, though a man may appear to be praying alone, he is not alone.

About Matthew 18:10, “of the little ones, and of the least, which see God,” Clement makes explicit reference to “the oversight reaching to us exercised by the tutelary angels.” In this case, “tutelary angels” means guardian angels. Here Clement is interpreting Matthew 18:10, the words of our Saviour, to affirm Christ’s revelation that we each have guardian angels.<sup>24</sup>

To appreciate the significance of Clement of Alexandria, we must recognize that he was probably an Athenian. He, as with Pantaenus, eventually became a teacher at the catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt. Clement became a defender of the faith against Gnosticism, albeit his liberal tendencies promoted Christian gnosis. Despite this error, his contribution to angelology was significant since his writings were probably reflective of the community of Christian believers.

Origen<sup>25</sup> was Clement’s most outstanding pupil.

Origen, perhaps the greatest of the early church fathers considering his theological contributions, too contributed an exegesis of Matthew 18:10.

*All...things were disposed, as I have said, not indiscriminately and fortuitously, but by a most appropriate and just decision of God, who arranged them according to deserts, in accordance with His own approval and judgment: so that one angel the Church of the Ephesians was to be entrusted; to another, that of the Smyrnaeans; one angel was to be Peter’s, another Paul’s; and so on through every one of the little ones that are in the Church, for such and such angels as even daily behold the face of God must be assigned to each one of them; and there must also be some angel that encampeth round about them that fear God. All of which things, assuredly, it is to be believed, are not performed by accident or chance, or because they (the angels) were so created, lest on that view the Creator should be accused of partiality; but it is to be believed that they were conferred by God, thee just and impartial Ruler of all things, agreeably to the merits and good qualities and mental vigour of each individual spirit.*<sup>26</sup>

What Origen’s exegesis tells us is that nothing, regarding the angels, has occurred by accident. God has no accidents. As stated in the introduction of this paper, God is intimately involved in His

creation and has planned everything as it exists. Therefore, as nation's have angels assigned to them, so do churches and each person. We see to this point the harmony of Clement and Origen regarding the words of our Saviour.

But Origen goes beyond Clement and proffers three further statements: each individual is “attended” by a guardian angel, a warning that an unworthy individual could lose their guardian angel, and we must listen to the “admonitions” of our guardian angel.

*Each believer, although the humblest in the Church, is said to be attended by an angel, who is declared by the Saviour always to behold the face of God the Father, and as this angel was certainly one with the object of his guardianship; so, if the latter is rendered unworthy by his want of obedience, the angel of God is said to be taken from him, and then that part of him—the part, viz., which belongs to his human nature—being rent away from the divine part, is assigned a place along with unbelievers, because it has not faithfully observed the admonitions of the angel allotted it by God.*<sup>27</sup>

While every person may have a guardian angel attending to his or her needs, we best not take the guardian angel for granted lest we lose it and be “assigned to a place with unbelievers.” This is the most precise and most succinct articulation, aside from our Saviour's words, regarding universal individual guardian angels.

We cannot overstate the importance of Matthew 18:10. In Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, he states that “the angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him and delivereth them... and, so long as we are imperfect, and need one to assist us that we may be delivered from evils, we need an angel of whom Jacob said, *‘The angel who delivered me from all evils.’*”<sup>28</sup> Our guardian angel is here to protect us and will do so providing we listen to it. Again Origen is warning us, so long as we are imperfect (and we always will be imperfect) we are in “*need of one to assist us.*” As I stated in the introduction, please do not take your guardian angel for granted! You cannot succeed alone.

It is for this reason that we must “[*entrust*] ourselves to the Supreme God through Jesus Christ, who has given us such instruction and asking of Him all help, and the guardianship of holy and good angels, to defend us from the earth-spirits intent on lust, and blood, and sacrificial odours, and strange sounds and other sensual things!”<sup>29</sup>

Origen has been called the “father of Christian theology” and for a good reason, as I hope is partially evident above. A student of Clement of Alexandria, he succeeded Clement as the head of the catechetical school in Alexandria. The most prolific writer of the pre-Nicene period, his efforts reflect brilliant spiritual insights. In 250 A.D., when the emperor Decius was persecuting Christians, Origen was imprisoned and tortured for one year, only to be released in 251 A.D. upon Decius' death. Origen withstood the tortures and never recanted his Christian beliefs. However, he would die soon after his release, his death being caused by the tortures he endured. Origen's doctrinal and apologetic efforts

numbered over 2000 works.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps Origen's most famous student was St. Gregory The Wonderworker.<sup>31</sup>

St. Gregory, too, acknowledged the existence and role of guardian angels—particularly his guardian angel that led him to Origen.

“But let this word of ours be taken primarily as an eucharistic address in honour of this sacred personage, who stands alone among all men; and if I may seek to discourse of aught beyond this, and, in particular, of any of those beings who are not seen, but yet are more godlike, and who have a special care for men, it shall be addressed to that being who, by some momentous decision, had me allotted to him from my boyhood to rule, and rear, and train,—I mean that holy angel of God who fed me from my youth, as says the saint dear to God, meaning thereby his own peculiar one.

...

But we, in addition to the homage we offer to the Common Ruler of all men, acknowledge and praise that being, whosoever he is, who has been the wonderful guide of our childhood, who in all other matters has been in time past my beneficent tutor and guardian. For this office of tutor and guardian is one which evidently can suit neither me nor any of my friends and kindred; for we are all blind, and see nothing of what is before us, so as to be able to judge of what is right and fitting; but it can suit only him who sees beforehand all that is for the good of our soul: that angels, I say, who still at this present time sustains, and instructs, and conducts me; and who, in addition to all these other benefits, has brought me into connection with this man [Origen], which in truth is the most important of all the services done me.<sup>32</sup>

St. Gregory is paying great homage to his guardian angel, who has had to “rule, and rear, and train” and “fed” him from his youth. Gregory attributes his guardian angel with the roles of being his “beneficent tutor and guardian.” As highly as Gregory holds Origen, it is probably worth saying that his emotions, while perhaps influencing the inflection of his language, are not influencing the essence of his beliefs. On the contrary, Gregory is manifesting his spiritual beliefs in his words. There should be no doubt that he believes he is indebted to his guardian angel.

It is worth noting that Gregory was not raised in a Christian family. His family was financially reasonably well to do, and this afforded him a legal education in Athens and Berytus, the latter being the “mother and nurse” of Roman civil law. During his time at Berytus, Gregory was moved by his guardian angel to travel to Palestinian Caesarea where he would meet Origen. As a student of Origen “he received lessons in logic, geometry, physics, ethics, philosophy, and ancient literature, and in due time also in biblical science and the verities of the Christian faith.”<sup>33</sup> Gregory would eventually go on to become the bishop of his hometown, Neo-Caesarea.

I believe it is important to note that Gregory was a student in the mode of learning and acquiring knowledge for a lengthy period. While we do not know the exact length of time he was a student, he did study at least from 219 A.D. (if not before) through 238 A.D., when, after spending five years with Origen, they went their separate ways. He was willing, if not wanting, to learn. And this quality no doubt empowered his guardian angel to rule, rear, train, and feed him. Gregory went on to become a faithful servant of God, no doubt guided by his guardian angel.<sup>34</sup>

## Canon To The Guardian Angel

### *Troparion*

*O Angel of God, my holy Guardian, keep my life in the fear of Christ God,  
strengthen my mind in the true way and wound my soul with heavenly love,  
so that guided by Thee, I may obtain the great mercy of Christ God.*

*Archpriest Nectarios Trevino*

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<sup>1</sup> St. Basil, *Adv. Eun.*, 3, 1. Please note: where no page number is provided with regard to references to the writings of the Church Fathers, it is because the information was extracted from the CD-ROM, entitled: *The Early Church Fathers*, Harmony Media, Inc., 2000.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> It is important to state upfront that this conclusion is contrary to that of St. Thomas Aquinas who stated: “Angels do not grieve, either for sins or for the pains inflicted on men.” Yet St. Thomas does state “in man’s repentance and in man’s sin there is one reason *for the angel’s joy*, namely the fulfillment of the ordering of the Divine Providence.” (*Emphasis added.*) *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Question 113, Article 7. Joy is a positive emotion. It is perhaps worth pointing out that Jean Danielou, S.J., in Chapter 4 of *The Angels and Their Mission* attributes overwhelming joy, astonishment, and exaltation to the angels at the Ascension of Christ. In this case positive emotions are also attributed to the angels. My conclusion, however, is that angels can and do possess emotions akin to sorrow, weeping, and sadness. To support this conclusion I rely on tradition and the axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*. In the Orthodox Christian *Canon to the Guardian Angel*, Ode 4, we pray the following to our guardian angel: “Grow not weary of me” and “O my guide, abide with me in forbearance.” In Ode 5 we pray “Foreseeing the torments and punishments awaiting me and pitying my callousness, insensibility, and blindness, *thou sighest and grieveest and lamentest*, being filled with mourning, O my deliverer.” [*Emphasis added.*] Ode 5 continues: “Not for an hour, not for a moment or even a portion thereof have I permitted thee, my benefactor and guardian, to rejoice, to be glad, or to exult in me, who am forever corrupting myself with sins.” Indeed the Orthodox Christian does not, and should not, take his/her guardian angel for granted. In Ode 6, we beseech our guardian angel to “cease not from guarding me and encircling me round about.” We continue

beseeking in Ode 7 by pleading that our guardian angel “Cease not from mightily driving off with the fiery sword the myriads of invisible thieves attacking me round about...forget not thy servant, O my guide.” In Ode 8 Orthodox Christians credit our guardian angels with the need to “chastise” and “admonish” us to be saved. In the final stichera to the Canon we continue appealing to our guardian angels to “cease not to make entreaty...do not cease to ever shelter [our soul]...[and] cease not to care for me.” The foregoing quotations are from *A Prayer Book For Orthodox Christians*, translated from the Greek by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline, Mass., 1995), 303-319. One final note regarding a biblical verse is perhaps appropriate: “Jesus wept.” See John 11.35. If Jesus can weep out of love and sympathy, so, too, can the angels.

4 Danielou, Jean, S.J. *The Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church*. (Allen, Tx, 1953), 81.

5 The fact that one who believes in a Triune God must believe in angels and guardian angels is key tenet of both the Western and Eastern Churches. For a member of either church to not believe in angels or guardian angels is antithetical to the faith.

6 Genesis 48:16, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton. (USA, 1998), 67. Hereafter, inasmuch as all Old Testament citations in this paper will emanate from the same text, referred to as *LXX*.

7 Isa. 1:2, *LXX*. “Hear, O heaven and hearken, O earth: for the Lord has spoken, saying, I have begotten and reared up children, but they have rebelled against me.”

8 Jer. 2:12, 13. *LXX*. “The heaven is amazed at this, and is very exceedingly horror-struck, saith the Lord. For my people has committed two faults, and evil ones: they have forsaken me, the fountain of water of life, and hewn out for themselves broken cisterns, which will not be able to hold water.”

9 St. Basil, *On the Spirit*, Chapter 13.

10 Platonists by definition, albeit simplified, are rationalists (seeking objects of the senses) and pursuers of eternal truths (seeking objects of the intellect, usually with a reliance on mathematical knowledge).

11 Rom 1:17; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20; 3:11 RSV

12 Heb 11:1, RSV

13 Matthew 18:10 RSV

14 Heb 1:14 RSV

15 And not just the baptized as some theologian scholars would hold.

16 St. John Chrysostom. *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles. Homily XXVI*. Acts XII. 1, 2.

17 Cited in Danielou, p. 71. *Clement of Alexandria, Ecl.*, 50; Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13, 49; Methodius, *Conv.*, 2, 6; Tertullian, *De an.*, 37, 1.



18 Acts 12:15-16 RSV

19 John 6:29 RSV. “Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

20 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantaenus>

21 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement\\_of\\_Alexandria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement_of_Alexandria)

22 Clement of Rome, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, The Stromata, Book VI*, Chapter II. (Peabody, Mass., 1995), 524.

23 Ibid., 545.

24 Ibid, 466.

25 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origen>

26 Origen, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4, De Principiis, Book I*, Chapter VIII. (Peabody, Mass., 1995), 265.

27 Ibid., 296.

28 Ibid., *Volume 9, Commentary on Matthew*, 490.

29 Ibid., *Against Celsus, Book VIII*, 662.

30 Only St. Augustine would be a more prolific writer.

31 Gregory Thaumaturgus (Wonder-Worker), ca. 213—ca. 260.

32 St. Gregory Thaumaturgos, *The Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen, Argument IV*, 24-25.

33 Ibid., 5.

34 If for no other reason than anecdotal interest, Gregory is worthy of his last name—wonder-worker. The following material is quoted from the footnote on page 6 of Volume 6 (ibid.). “He could move the largest stones by a word; he could heal the sick; the demons were subject to him, and were exorcised by his fiat; he could give bounds to overflowing rivers; he could dry up mighty lakes; he could cast his cloak over a man, and cause his death; once, spending a night in a heathen temple, he banished its divinities by his simple presence, and by merely placing on the altar a piece of paper bearing the words, *Gregory to Satan—enter*, he could bring the presiding demons back to their shrine. One strange story told of him by Gregory of Nyssa is to the effect that, as Gregory was meditating on the great matter of the right way to worship the true God, suddenly two glorious personages made themselves manifest in his room, in the one of whom he recognized the Apostle John, in the other the Virgin. They had come, as the story goes, to solve the difficulties which were making him hesitate in accepting the bishopric. At Mary’s request, the evangelist gave him then all the instruction in doctrine which he was seeking for; and the sum of these supernatural communications being written down by him after the vision vanished, formed the creed which is still preserved among his writings. Such were the wonders believed to signalize the life of Gregory.”

# TOWARD A THEOLOGY ON GUARDIAN ANGELS: ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH FATHERS: PART 2—TODAY

*Archpriest Nectarios Trevino*

## Part 1

*The title of this paper is deliberately chosen. The first word of the title—"toward"—has been used because this paper is not a definitive work. Rather it is intended to be an initial step, albeit a very modest one, toward a more significant effort on guardian angels. Therefore, please read the following article, Part 2 of 2, in light of this objective.*

### **The Powers of Guardian Angels**

There are multiple other citations available regarding the existence of guardian angels. For brevity, it is essential to move on and address the powers of the guardian angels. In doing so, we will look at the capabilities of angels—the more extensive set—of which guardian angels are a subset. There is no attribute that guardian angels can possess that is not within the realm of the angels.

It is not an oversimplification to say that guardian angels have limited powers. Nor would it be an overstatement to say that guardian angels are empowered by the person whom they are attending to or looking after. Let me address the former before addressing the latter.

Guardian angels cannot forgive sins.

"I have written this, not in order to confound you, but that the examples of these kings may stir you up to put away this sin from your kingdom, for you will do it away by humbling your soul before God. You are a man, and it has come upon you, conquer it. Sin is not done away but by tears and penitence. Neither angel can do it, nor archangel. The Lord Himself, Who alone can say, "I am with you," if we have sinned, does not forgive any but those who repent."<sup>1</sup>

Only God can forgive sins. Ambrose goes on to say:

"That the Spirit forgives sin is common to Him with the Father and the Son, but not with the Angels. Tell me, then, whoever you are who deny the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit could not be liable to sin, Who rather forgives sin. Does an Angel forgive? Does an Archangel? Certainly not, but the Father alone, the Son alone, and the Holy Spirit alone. Now no one is unable to avoid that which he has power to forgive."<sup>2</sup>

Let there be no doubt, no equivocation whatsoever, that the angels and our guardian angels are powerless when it comes to forgiving sins. They can listen to us (all the while knowing the truth since they have been with us the entire time). They can hear our side of the story and tales of woe, but their listening will not obviate the need for the Holy Mystery of Repentance.

Angels have free will.

“It is to be observed further, that freedom of will is used in several senses, one in connection with God, another in connection with angels, and a third in connection with men. For used in reference to God it is to be understood in a superessential manner, and in reference to angels it is to be taken in the sense that the election is concomitant with the state, and admits of the interposition of no interval of time at all: for while the angel possesses free-will by nature, he uses it without let or hindrance, having neither antipathy on the part of the body to overcome nor any assailant.”<sup>3</sup>

Given the nature of angels, their decision to exercise their free will for God or for the Prince of Futility was made at the time of their creation. We believe that angels, as personal beings, have reason and, consequently, the freedom to form personal moral decisions—throughout our lives. Therefore, it is conceivable that angels could sin. If tradition is correct, the evil angels with the Prince of Futility, having chosen not to serve God, are in sin. And this exists even though the angels as they were created were pure, possessed of natural happiness, sanctified by the Holy Spirit from their creation, and lived in blessed holy communion with God. Nevertheless, some angels continue to serve God. And others do not. Of those who serve God, i.e., our guardian angels, He works in creation through them.

Angels cannot be in two places simultaneously.

“The angel, although not contained in place with figured form as is body, yet is spoken of as being in place because he has a mental presence and energises in accordance with his nature, and is not elsewhere but has his mental limitations there where he energises. For it is impossible to energise at the same time in different places. For to God alone belongs the power of energising everywhere at the same time. The angel energises in different places by the quickness of his nature and the promptness and speed by which he can change his place: but the Deity, Who is everywhere and above all, energises at the same time in diverse ways with one simple energy.”<sup>4</sup>

While not omnipresent like God, they can move very, very fast from one place to another. Our human conceptions of speed are wholly irrelevant to the speed at which angels can move. Thus in but a mere moment, our guardian angels can be beside us, then move to be before God and return to our side without us knowing (as if we could understand) that it ever left our side.

Although our guardian angels cannot forgive our sins, it ought to be evident that as messengers of God, they can communicate with God on our behalf and communicate with us on God’s behalf. In this

role, they may comfort us—providing we are listening to them. St. Luke presents a sterling example of this possibility when he states, *“Then an angel appeared to Him [Jesus Christ] from heaven, strengthening Him.”* Within the gospels, only St. Luke reports this event. It reflects the human agony of Jesus and the divine help given to Him as He contemplates his Crucifixion. Indeed, if *“Christ in his [human] agony [has] an angel to strengthen Him”*<sup>5</sup> then we, too, can have the same consideration—assuming we are listening and open to God’s creation. Of this, Hippolytus of Rome states, *“And in an agony He sweats blood, and is strengthened by an angel, who Himself strengthens those who believe in Him.”*<sup>6</sup> If we believe in Him, He will strengthen us through His angels.

Similarly, St. John Chrysostom teaches us that angels have a role in guiding and protecting us. In his guidance to the catechumens, he refers to a guardian angel’s role as an angel of peace.

“For part we say ourselves, and part we permit them to say, now opening unto them the door of prayer, (exactly as we first teach children [what to say], and then bid them say it of themselves,) saying, “Pray ye, Catechumens, for the angel of peace;” for there is an angel that punisheth, as when He saith, “A band of evil angels,” (Ps. lxxviii. 49) there is that destroyeth. Wherefore we bid them ask for the angel of peace, teaching them to seek that which is the bond of all good things, peace; so that they may be delivered from all fightings, all wars, all seditions.”<sup>7</sup>

The “angel of peace” is referred to for catechumens and carried forth into the Orthodox liturgy to this day.

From the above, we have learned that angels, and by extension, guardian angels, have limited powers.

- They cannot forgive our sins.
- They have free will. And this is important because we should recognize that our guardian angels—are with us. After all, they want to be with us.
- They cannot be in two places simultaneously, but they can move faster than we can imagine. And this is important because it means for all practical human purposes that they never leave our side.
- They are messengers of God. There should be no doubt about this.
- They can comfort us in our time of need.
- They can guide and protect us from evil.
- In the sections preceding this, we learned that guardian angels could be our tutors to rule, rear, train, and feed us spiritually.

The preceding list is certainly not all-inclusive vis-à-vis the angelic powers. The pursuit of a humanly discernible all-inclusive list would be vain. But the above list is essential in enabling us to determine what the role of our guardian angels is in our daily lives. Knowing what our guardian angels can and cannot do moves us to the second issue posited at the beginning of this section: “Nor would it be an overstatement to say that guardian angels are empowered by the person whom they are attending to or looking after.”

We empower our guardian angels to act. We, you and I, empower our guardian angels to assume the roles listed above. However, proof of this premise is impossible. Acceptance of this premise is an act of faith. But I would once again cite Hippolytus of Rome, “*And in an agony He sweats blood, and is strengthened by an angel, who Himself strengthens those who believe in Him.*”<sup>8</sup> The critical phrase to consider is: “strengthened by an angel, who Himself strengthens those who believe in him.” In other words, we must exercise our faith! We must let God know of our love for Him. We must live our faith in our daily lives. By doing so, we will open ourselves to God and His will and empower Him to act upon us in a pleasing way to Him. And one of these ways is through our guardian angel! We will have authorized our guardian angel to work with and upon us and serve God in our life.

### **Lex Orandi, Lex Crendi**

The Law of prayer is the law of belief. This axiom is embedded in the West and Orthodox Christian Churches. The axiom of tradition can be traced back to St. Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390-ca.-463 A.D.). It affirms the “liturgy as the norm of the faith, that is, how the Church prays witnesses to what the Church believes.”<sup>9</sup> Demonstration of this “norm of the faith” is evident in every Orthodox Divine Liturgy.

In the *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, the following petition is included in the Second Litany of Supplication immediately following the Anaphora and preceding the Lord’s Prayer. “*An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us beseech the Lord.*” If we are going to make *lex orandi, lex credendi* meaningful, come to life and be a part of our living faith, then we—Orthodox Christians—need to take the above petition regarding our guardian angel to heart.

### **Conclusion**

This study is but a brief one. There is so much more that could be stated regarding guardian angels. And no matter how much more we would write, it never fully captures the entire realm of possibilities and roles of the guardian angel in our lives. This we, as humans, can never begin to know—nor is it necessary for us to know—the magnitude of the role of guardian angels in our lives. What is important is that there are guardian angels. Matthew 18:10, the words of our Saviour, states unequivocally that guardian angels exist. What is also essential—and this we must appreciate—is that we can empower our guardian angels to serve the God-intended role in our lives. It is up to us to act. We must open up to God’s will, love Him, and serve Him. In doing so, we will come to a greater awareness of the heavenly realm.

Going back to the beginning paragraphs of this paper, guardian angels are serious business. It is not a subject we should trivialize or take for granted. Why? Because God is serious.

## **Canon To The Guardian Angel**

### ***Troparion***

*O Angel of God, my holy Guardian, keep my life in the fear of Christ God, strengthen my mind in the true way and wound my soul with heavenly love, so that guided by Thee, I may obtain the great mercy of Christ God.*

### ***From the letters of Archimandrite John (Krestiankin)***

*When leaving your home, be sure to read the prayer to the cross of the Lord, and when you have a meeting with people you are afraid of, read this prayer too.*

*And the Lord and your Guardian Angel will protect you from all evil.*

*Yes, there are now people who consciously choose evil, but they cannot do anything to those who are with God. After all, the enemy is strong, but only the Lord is omnipotent.*

*Archpriest Nectarios Trevino*

*10/8/2020*

1 St. Ambrose, *Selected Letters. Letter LI.*

2 St. Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit to the Emperor Gratian, Book I, Chapter X.*

3 St. Basil, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book III. Chapter XIV.*

4 St. Basil, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book I, Chapter XIII.*

5 St. Jerome. *Against the Pelagians, Book II, Chapter 16.*

6 Hippolytus of Rome. *Extant Works and Fragments. Expository Treatise Against The Jews.*

7 St. John Chrysostom. *Homilies on Second Corinthians, Homily II: 2 Cor i.10, 11.*

8 Op.cit., Hippolytus of Rome.

9 Bretzke, James T., S.J. *Consecrated Phrases: A Latin Theological Dictionary.* (Collegeville, Minn., 1998), 65.