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Comparison of New Church and other Christian Beliefs about Angels

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

(A summary of what I said during the Opening Service at our Conference 2025)

Both New Church Christians and other Christians believe in angels. We believe they exist and we're happy to believe that they can help us. However, there are differences of belief about angels. One difference is that we believe angels are people, and our most important teaching about angels, is that we have been

created to become angels. If we are going to talk to Christians outside the New Church about angels, we need to anticipate the differences.

Messengers: There is no special or unique word for ‘angel’ in Hebrew, Greek or Latin. The word for ‘messenger’ is used which can refer to messengers of people, such as Jacob, John the Baptist, and so on. The only time ‘messenger’ becomes angel, if the angel does something supernatural, such as announcing a baby to a couple in their nineties or rises into the heavens from a sacrifice. Sometimes angels translates the word for ‘God’ in Psalm 8, for ‘sons of God’ or ‘heavenly beings’.

Family members: Angels regard us as members of their family, ¹ or as “fellow-servants”. Another translation is that of fellow slaves. (Revelation 19:10; 22:9) We are all “worthless slaves”. (Luke 17:10)

When were they created?: In the New Church we believe that angels were created as people, while other Christians believe they are a separate creation. On the first day, when heaven and earth was created, it was only the earth that was “a formless void”, so heaven must be full of angels. Angels are beings of light, so that they must have been created on the first day of creation, or the fourth. They might have been created on the fifth day, as that’s when the ‘winged creatures’ were created. (I have yet to find a passage in the Bible, in which angels have wings. Swedenborg very rarely saw angels with wings, unless they looked like the Greek god Hermes or the Roman god Mercury. ² Like Superman, just because angels fly, doesn’t mean they have wings. There are two women with wings with a basket in Zechariah 5:9.)

Job 38:7: Christians understand that the angels were singing at the creation of the world. However, we would understand it to refer to re-creations, when angels are joyous when any sinner repents. (Luke 15:7, 10)

Angels are people: In the Bible angels are seen as men. (We’ve already mentioned that there were women in Zechariah.) In Jewish mythology, Enoch became the archangel Metatron, and Elijah became the archangel Sandalphon. In the Book of Tobit, which is in the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books between the two Testaments, which are popular in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox figures, a blood relative of Tobit, is actually archangel Raphael. (Tobit 10:6; 12:15) Many Christians believe that angels are spirits, basing their belief on Hebrews 1:7

““Of the angels he says,
‘He makes his angels winds,
and his servants flames of fire.’”

This is a rather ambiguous translation of Psalm 104:4

“you make the winds your [or *his*] messengers,
fire and flame your [or *his*] ministers.” (Psalm 104:4)

You’ll notice that the order is reversed, so, for example, are the winds messengers, or the messengers winds? I would suggest that both are acceptable, which might suggest the

¹ *Secrets of Heaven* §2890; 3796:4; *Apocalypse Revealed* §818; cf. *Apocalypse Explained* §746:9

² *Marriage Love* §136 = *True Christianity* §48:20

layers of meaning with the Sacred Scriptures. Angels, like us, are baptised with the Holy Spirit and Fire, namely, that we are inspired by the LORD, and our hearts are moved by love, energy and enthusiasm. Martin Luther wrote “angels are spiritual creatures, created by God without a body, for the service of Christendom and the church.”³ Some good, honest spirits “kept insisting that I should take back the message that they were not formless minds or ethereal breath but human in form, and that they saw and heard and felt just as much as people in this world do.”⁴

Incarnate or excarnate?: Many Christians believe that angels being spirits, have to assume or take on a human body,⁵ and come into our world. In the New Church we believe that we excarnate, that is, we leave our physical body, and have a vision of what is going on in the spiritual world. Of course, we believe there are angelic people, whom we can see in our world.

Cherubim, Seraphim and the four living creatures: Other Christians believe that cherubim, seraphim and the four living creatures in the Bible are types of angels. In the New Church we believe that they are symbolic, holographic images. They can be manufactured inside the heads of angels and projected outwards to illustrate spiritual principles of watchfulness, protection and providence.

I then said a prayer based on *Apocalypse Explained* §1145:10-11, which talks of ‘angelic people’ (*angelus homo*):

LORD Jesus the Messiah, we affirm that you have created each one of us to be angels in your heavenly kingdom. We thank you for teaching us that we can be “angelic people” now. You lead us from within through inspiration, nudges and moving our hearts. You lead us from outside, through your Divine Word, through preaching and teaching, through conversations with friends, relatives, and members of our churches; from reading books, watching YouTube videos and many more ways.⁶ You continually lead us out of our personal hell of selfishness, greed, self-pity, impatience and other failings. We love the heart-virtues that our church moves us to embody, such as love, kindness, patience, tolerance, empathy, and so on, because they are the values of heaven. We love the messages and lessons, that we learn from our church’s teachings, which inspire us, because they explain something of our inner successes and struggles, and they expound the inspired books of the Bible. We thank you for those times we feel freest, to minister and serve other people without thought of reward. It never ceases to amaze us how you give us the words to speak and opportunities to help other people. We again affirm our humble joy at being your servants and your “angelic people”. Amen.

We sang the New Church hymn “Angels, our brothers, are messengers bright” (*Lepton*) and the hymn “Will you come and follow me” (*Kelvingrove*), which was written by two Church of Scotland Ministers.

³ Judith MacNutt *Angels are for Real* 2012:25

⁴ *Heaven and Hell* §77 [Dole]

⁵ Swedenborg knew of this belief. (*Apocalypse Explained* §53:2; *Lord (De Domino)* [1762] §14) and even believed it in 1746! (*Word Explained* [1746] §1457)

⁶ *Apocalypse Explained* §§1136:9; 1173:2; 1175:4