

QUESTION 108

The Arrangement of Angels according to Hierarchies and Orders

The next thing we have to consider is the arrangement of angels according to hierarchies and orders. For it was explained above (q. 106, a. 3) that higher angels illuminate lower angels, and not vice versa.

On this topic there are eight questions: (1) Do all angels belong to a single hierarchy? (2) Is there just a single ordering within each hierarchy? (3) Does more than one angel belong to each order? (4) Does the distinction among the hierarchies and orders stem from nature? (5) What are the names and properties of each order? (6) How are the orders related to one another? (7) Will the orders endure beyond judgment day? (8) Are men assumed into the orders of angels?

Article 1

Do all angels belong to a single hierarchy?

It seems that all angels belong to a single hierarchy:

Objection 1: Since angels are the highest of creatures, one must claim that they are arranged in the best way. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 12 and *Politics* 3, the best arrangement of a multitude is for it to be contained under a single principality (*principatus*). Therefore, since a hierarchy is nothing other than a sacred principality, it seems that all angels belong to a single hierarchy.

Objection 2: In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 3, Dionysius says, “A hierarchy consists in order, knowledge, and action.” But all the angels share a single ordering with respect to God, whom they know and by whom they are ruled in their actions. Therefore, all angels belong to a single hierarchy.

Objection 3: The sacred principality called a hierarchy is found among men and among angels. But all men belong to a single hierarchy. Therefore, all angels likewise belong to a single hierarchy.

But contrary to this: In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 6, Dionysius distinguishes three hierarchies of angels.

I respond: As has just been pointed out, a hierarchy is a sacred principality. Now two things are understood in the name ‘principality’, viz., (a) the ruler (*princeps*) himself and (b) the multitude that is ordered under the ruler.

Thus, since God is the single ruler not only of all angels but also of men and of every creature, it follows that there is a single hierarchy consisting not only of all angels but of every rational creature that is capable of participating in sacred things. Accordingly, in *De Civitate Dei* 12 Augustine says, “There are two cities, i.e., societies, one consisting of good angels and good men, and the other consisting of bad angels and bad men.”

On the other hand, if ‘principality’ is understood with reference to the multitude that is ordered under the ruler, then a principality is called one to the extent that a given multitude can be governed by the ruler in one and the same manner. By contrast, multitudes that the ruler cannot govern in the same manner belong to diverse principalities—as when, for instance, under a single king there are diverse cities ruled by diverse laws and ministers.

Now it is clear that men receive divine illuminations in a way different from angels. For as Dionysius puts it in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 1, angels receive such illuminations in their intelligible purity, whereas men receive them under sensible likenesses. And so the human hierarchy must be distinguished from the angelic hierarchy.

And in this same way, three hierarchies are distinguished among the angels. For as was explained above when we were discussing angelic cognition (q. 55, a. 3), the higher angels have a more universal

cognition of the truth than the lower angels do. Now among the angels one can distinguish three levels of this sort of universal cognitive reception. For the reasons behind the things that the angels are illuminated about can be considered in three ways.

First of all, these reasons can be considered insofar as they proceed from the *first universal principle*, viz., God. This mode of cognitive reception belongs to the first hierarchy, which reaches directly to God and, as Dionysius puts it in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 7, “is located in God’s vestibule, as it were.”

Second, the reasons in question can be considered insofar as they depend on *universal created causes*, which at this point are multiplied in a certain way. This mode of cognitive reception belongs to the second hierarchy.

Third, these reasons can be considered insofar as they are applied to individual things and depend on *proper causes*. This mode of cognitive reception belongs to the lowest hierarchy.

All of this will become clearer below (a. 6), when we discuss each order of angels individually.

This, then, is the way in which hierarchies are distinguished within a multitude of subjects. Hence, it is clear that those who posit a hierarchy among the divine persons, which they call a ‘super-celestial hierarchy’, are mistaken, and that their claim goes against Dionysius’s intention. For even though there is a certain order of nature among the divine persons, there is no hierarchy, since, as Dionysius says in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 3, “The ordering of a hierarchy is such that there are some who are cleansed, illuminated, and perfected, whereas there are others who do the cleansing and illuminating and perfecting.” We hold that this sort of thing is entirely absent among the divine persons.

Reply to objection 1: This objection is about a principality with reference to the ruler, since, as the Philosopher says in the cited passages, a multitude is best ruled by a single ruler.

Reply to objection 2: The angels are not distinguished into hierarchies as regards their cognition of God Himself, whom they all see in the same way, viz., through His essence. Rather, as has been explained, the angels are distinguished into hierarchies by [their mode of understanding] the reasons for created things.

Reply to objection 3: All men belong to a single species, and a single mode of understanding is connatural to all of them. But it is not this way with the angels. Therefore, the arguments are not parallel.

Article 2

Is there more than one order in a single hierarchy?

It seems that there is not more than one order in a single hierarchy:

Objection 1: When definitions are multiplied, the things defined are multiplied. But as Dionysius says, a hierarchy is an order. Therefore, if there are many orders, then there will be many hierarchies and not just a single hierarchy.

Objection 2: Diverse orders are diverse grades. Now among spiritual things, grades are constituted by diverse spiritual gifts. But among the angels all spiritual gifts are common, since “nothing is possessed in a unique way.” Therefore, it is not the case that there are diverse orders of angels.

Objection 3: Within the Church’s hierarchy, orders are distinguished with respect to cleansing (*purgare*), illuminating (*illuminare*), and perfecting (*perficere*). For as Dionysius says in *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 5, the order of deacons is purgative, the order of priests is illuminative, and the order of bishops is perfective. But every angel cleanses, illuminates, and perfects. Therefore,

there is no distinction of orders among the angels.

But contrary to this: In Ephesians 1:21 the Apostle says that God has set the man Christ “above every Principality and Power and Virtue and Domination.” But these are diverse orders of angels, and some of them belong to the same hierarchy, as will become clear below (a. 6).

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), a hierarchy is a principality, i.e., a multitude ordered in a unified way under the governance of a ruler. However, a multitude would be disorderly (*confusa*), and not orderly, if there were not diverse orders within the multitude. Therefore, the very notion of a hierarchy requires a diversity of orders, and this diversity of orders involves diverse roles (*officia*) and activities (*actus*). For instance, it is clear that in a city there are diverse orders that involve diverse activities. For there is one order of those who judge, another order of those who fight, another order of those who work in the fields, and so on for the others. But even though there are many orders in a single city, they can nonetheless be reduced to three, since every complete multitude has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Hence, in cities there are three orders of men. For some are the highest, viz., the aristocrats (*optimates*), whereas others are the lowest, viz., the common people (*vilis populus*), and still others are in the middle, viz., the ‘respectable’ people (*populus honorabilis*).

So, then, in each angelic hierarchy there are orders distinguished with respect to diverse activities and roles, and all of this diversity is reduced to three orders, viz. the highest, the middle, and the lowest. This is why Dionysius posits three orders in each of the hierarchies.

Reply to objection 1: ‘Order’ has two meanings. First, it means the very ordering that includes within itself the diverse grades, and this is the sense in which a hierarchy is called an order. Second, ‘order’ means one particular grade, and this is the sense in which there are said to be many orders within a single hierarchy.

Reply to objection 2: Within the society of angels all things are possessed in common, but some of them are possessed in a more excellent way by certain angels than by other angels. Now each thing is had more perfectly by someone who is able to communicate it to another than by someone who is not able to communicate it. For instance, something that is able to give heat is more perfectly hot than something that is unable to give it; and someone who is able to teach has a more perfect knowledge than someone who is unable to teach. And the more perfect the gift that one is able to communicate, the more perfect the grade he belongs to. For instance, someone who can teach a higher science belongs to a more perfect grade of teacher. The diversity of grades or orders among the angels should be thought of along similar lines, in accord with their diverse roles and activities.

Reply to objection 3: The lowest angel is higher than the highest man in our own hierarchy. For according to Matthew 11:11, “One who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,” viz., John the Baptist, “than whom none greater has arisen from those born of women.” Hence, a lesser angel of the heavenly hierarchy is able not only to cleanse, but also to illuminate and to perfect, in a way that exceeds the orders of our own hierarchy. And so it is not a distinction among these three actions that makes for a distinction among the heavenly orders; rather, it is a difference among other sorts of actions.

Article 3

Does more than one angel belong to a single order?

It seems that it is not the case that more than one angel belongs to a single order:

Objection 1: It was explained above (q. 50, a. 4) that all the angels are unequal to one another. But it is things that are equal that are said to belong to a single order. Therefore, it is not the case that

more than one angel belongs to a single order.

Objection 2: What can be adequately done through one thing is such that it is superfluous for it to be done through many. But whatever is involved in a single angelic role is adequately done by a single angel—even more so than the fact that what pertains to the sun’s role is adequately done by a single sun, since an angel is more perfect than a celestial body. Therefore, if, as was explained above (a. 2), the orders of angels are distinguished by their roles, then it is superfluous for there to be more than one angel in a single order.

Objection 3: It was explained above (q. 50, a. 4) that all angels are unequal. Therefore, if more than one angel—say, three or four—belonged to an order, then the lowest angel from the next highest order would have more in common with the highest angel from the next lowest order than he would with the highest angel of his own order. And so, it seems, he would not belong to the same order as the latter more than he belonged to the same order as the former. Therefore, it is not the case that more than one angel belongs to a single order.

But contrary to this: Isaiah 6:3 says that the Seraphim “cried out to one another.” Therefore, there is more than one angel in the order of the Seraphim.

I respond: Someone who knows a given group of entities perfectly can distinguish their acts and powers and natures down to the smallest details, whereas someone who knows them imperfectly is able to draw only general distinctions (*distinguere in universali*) among them, where a general distinction is made through fewer distinguishing marks. For instance, someone who knows natural things imperfectly makes general distinctions among the orders of natural things, placing celestial bodies in one order, and lower inanimate bodies in another order, and plants in another order, and animals in another order. By contrast, someone who knew natural things perfectly would be able to distinguish diverse orders within the celestial bodies themselves and within each of the other orders.

Now as Dionysius points out in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 6, we ourselves know angels and their roles imperfectly. Hence, we are able to draw only general distinctions among the roles and orders of angels, and it is in this sense that many angels are contained within a single order. However, if we knew the roles of the angels and the distinctions among them perfectly, then we would know perfectly that each angel has his own proper role and his own proper order among things—to an even greater extent than each celestial body (*stella*) does—even though this is now hidden from us.

Reply to objection 1: All the angels belonging to a single order are equal in the sense that they share the common likeness by which they are constituted in a single order; however, they are not equal to one another absolutely speaking. Hence, in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 10, Dionysius says that within one and the same order it is possible to designate those angels who are first, those who are in the middle, and those who are last.

Reply to objection 2: We do not know the detailed division of orders and roles according to which each angel has his own proper role and order.

Reply to objection 3: On a surface that is partly white and partly black, two parts located at the border of the white and the black agree more with respect to place than do some pairs of white parts (*quam aliquae duae partes albae*), even though they agree less with respect to [sensible] quality. In the same way, two angels who are located at the limits of two orders agree more with one another in closeness of nature than either one of them agrees with certain other angels belonging to their own respective orders. However, they agree less in their fitness for similar roles, where this sort of fitness extends up to some set limit.

Article 4

Does the distinction among the hierarchies and orders of angels stem from nature?

It seems that the distinction among the hierarchies and orders of angels does not stem from nature:

Objection 1: A hierarchy is a sacred principality, and in defining a hierarchy, Dionysius claims that a hierarchy simulates godlikeness as much as possible. But holiness and godlikeness exist in the angels through grace and not by nature. Therefore, the distinctions among the hierarchies and orders of angels stem from grace and not from nature.

Objection 2: As Dionysius says in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 7, the Seraphim are so called because they are ‘ardent’ or ‘on fire’. But this seems to involve charity, which comes from grace and not from nature. For as Romans 5:5 says, charity “is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us.” And as Augustine points out in *De Civitate Dei* 12, this has to do not just with holy men, but can also be applied to the holy angels. Therefore, the orders of the angels stem from grace and not from nature.

Objection 3: The Church’s hierarchy is modeled after the heavenly hierarchy. But among men, [holy] orders stem from a gift of grace and not from nature. For it is not by nature that one man is a bishop, another a priest, and another a deacon. Therefore, the orders of angels stem from grace alone and not from nature.

But contrary to this: In 2 *Sentences*, dist. 9, the Master says that an order of angels is a multitude of heavenly spirits that are like one another in a certain gift of grace, just as they agree with one another in their participation in natural gifts. Therefore, the distinctions among the orders of angels stem not only from their gifts of grace, but also from their natural gifts.

I respond: The order of governance, which is the order of a multitude that exists under an authority (*sub principatu*), has to do with the relation to an end. Now an angel’s end can be thought of in two ways:

First, it can be thought of in relation to what the angelic nature has the ability to do, viz., to know God and to love God with natural cognition and natural love. And in relation to this end, the orders of angels are distinguished by the natural gifts had by the angels.

Second, the end of the angelic multitude can be thought of in relation to their supernatural ability, which consists in seeing God’s essence and in enjoying God’s goodness unshakably. This end they can attain only through grace. Hence, in relation to this end the orders of angels are completely distinguished by their gifts of grace, though dispositively by their natural gifts—for, as was explained above (q. 62, a. 6), angels, unlike men, are given gifts of grace in proportion to the degree of their natural gifts. Hence, in the case of men, the orders are distinguished only by the gifts of grace and not by natural gifts.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: The replies to the objections are clear from what has been said.

Article 5

Are the orders of angels appropriately named?

It seems that the orders of angels are not appropriately named:

Objection 1: All of the heavenly spirits are called both angels and heavenly virtues. But names that are common to all are not appropriately applied just to some. Therefore, it is inappropriate to name

one order ‘Angels’ and another order ‘Virtues’.

Objection 2: According to Psalm 99:3 (“Know that the Lord Himself is God”), it is proper to God to be the Lord (*Dominus*). Therefore, it is inappropriate for an order of heavenly spirits to be called ‘Dominations’ (*Dominationes*).

Objection 3: The name ‘Dominations’ has to do, it seems, with governance. But so do the name ‘Principalities’ and the name ‘Powers’. Therefore, it is inappropriate to impose these three names on three different orders.

Objection 4: Archangels are so called because they are, as it were, the rulers (*principes*) of Angels. Therefore, the name ‘Archangels’ should not be imposed on any order other than the order of Principalities (*principatus*).

Objection 5: The name ‘Seraphim’ is imposed because of the ardor that belongs to charity, whereas the name ‘Cherubim’ is imposed because of knowledge. But charity and knowledge are gifts that are common to all the angels. Therefore, ‘Cherubim’ and ‘Seraphim’ should not be the names of specific orders.

Objection 6: ‘Thrones’ means seats. But God is said to be ‘seated’ in a rational creature in virtue of the fact that the creature knows and loves Him. Therefore, the order of Thrones should not be separate from the order of Seraphim and the order of Cherubim. And so it seems that the orders of angels are not appropriately named.

But contrary to this: It is the authority of Sacred Scripture that names the orders in this way. For the name ‘Seraphim’ is used in Isaiah 6:2; the name ‘Cherubim’ is used in Ezechiel 1; the name ‘Thrones’ is used in Colossians 1:16; the names ‘Dominations’, ‘Virtues’, ‘Powers’, and ‘Principalities’ are used in Ephesians 1:21; the name ‘Archangels’ is used in the canonical letter of Jude, verse 9; and the name ‘Angels’ is used in many places in Scripture.

I respond: In naming the angelic orders, we should notice that, as Dionysius says in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 7, the proper names of each order designate the properties of that order.

Now in order to discern the properties that belong to each order, we should note that there are three ways in which something can exist in the ordered entities, viz., (a) by way of *propriety* (*per proprietatem*), (b) by way of *eminence* (*per excessum*), and (c) by way of *participation* (*per participationem*). Something is said to exist in a given entity by way of *propriety* when it is equal to and proportionate to the entity’s nature. On the other hand, something is said to exist in an entity by way of *eminence* when what is attributed to the entity falls short of the entity to which it is attributed and yet belongs to it with a certain preeminence (*per quendam excessum*)—as has been explained in the case of all the names that are attributed to God (q. 13, a. 2). Finally, something is said to exist in an entity by way of *participation* when what is attributed to the entity is found in it in an incomplete way and not fully—in the way that saintly men are called ‘gods’ by participation.

Therefore, if something is to be named by a name designating what it has by way of *propriety*, then it should not be named either by reference to what it participates in imperfectly or by reference to what it has by way of eminence; instead, it should be named by reference to what is, as it were, equal to it. For instance, if someone wishes to give a proper designation of a man, he should say that a man is a *rational substance* and not that he is an *intellectual substance*, where ‘intellectual substance’ is the proper designation of an angel, since simple understanding (*simplex intelligentia*) belongs to an angel as a property, whereas it belongs to a man through participation; nor should he say that a man is a *sentient substance*, where ‘sentient substance’ is the proper designation of a brute animal, since sensation falls short of what is proper to a man and belongs to a man in a way that is preeminent over the other animals (*convenit homini excedenter prae aliis animalibus*).

So, then, in the case of the orders of angels, note that all the spiritual perfections are common to all

the angels and that all the perfections exist more abundantly in the higher angels than in the lower angels. However, since there is a certain gradation even among the perfections themselves, a higher perfection is attributed to a higher order by way of *propriety* and to a lower order by way of *participation*, whereas, conversely, a lower perfection is attributed to a lower order by way of *propriety* and to a higher order by way of *eminence*. And so a higher order is named by reference to a higher perfection. Thus, Dionysius explains the names of the orders by their agreement with the spiritual perfections of the orders.

By contrast, Gregory, in his own explanation of the names, seems to pay more attention to the exterior ministries of the orders. For he says, “Those who announce small matters are called Angels; those who announce great matters are called Archangels; those through whom miracles are done are called Virtues; those by whom opposed powers are repelled are called Powers; and those who preside over the good spirits themselves are called Principalities.”

Reply to objection 1: ‘Angel’ means a messenger. Therefore, all the heavenly spirits, insofar as they make divine things manifest, are called angels. But the higher angels have a certain excellence in this manifestation by reference to which the higher orders are named. On the other hand, the lowest order of angels does not add any excellence over and beyond the common sort of manifestation, and so they are named Angels by reference to simple manifestation. And so, as Dionysius says in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 5, the common name remains proper for the lowest order.

An alternative reply is that the lowest order is specifically called the order of Angels because they are the ones who make direct announcements to us.

Now ‘virtue’ can have two meanings. First, it can have a common meaning, according to which a virtue lies midway between an essence and its operation; and in this sense all the heavenly spirits are called heavenly virtues in the same way that they are called heavenly essences. Second, ‘virtue’ can have a meaning according to which it implies a certain excellence with respect to strength, and this is the sense in which it is the proper name of an order. Hence, in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 8, Dionysius says, “The name ‘Virtues’ signifies a certain manly and unshakeable strength”—which is appropriate, first of all, for all the divine operations that belong to them, and, second, for receiving divine gifts. And so the name ‘Virtues’ signifies that they fearlessly undertake the divine tasks that belong to them, and this seems to involve a strength of spirit.

Reply to objection 2: As Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 12, “Domination (*dominatio*) is praised in God uniquely by way of a certain excellence. However, by way of participation, the divine writings use the name ‘lords’ (*dominos*) for distinguished leaders through whom the lower angels receive God’s gifts.” Hence, in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 8, Dionysius says that the name ‘Dominations’ signifies, in the first place, “a certain freedom from a servile condition and from common subjection, such as that of the common people, along with a freedom from tyrannical oppression,” which sometimes even great men suffer from. Second, ‘Dominations’ signifies “a certain unyielding and unbending governance, not inclined toward any servile act or any act of the sort characteristic of those subjected to or oppressed by tyrants.” Third, ‘Dominations’ signifies “the desire for and participation in the true dominion that exists in God.”

In the same way, the name of each of the orders signifies a participation in that which exists in God. For instance, the name ‘Virtues’ signifies a participation in God’s strength, and so on for the others.

Reply to objection 3: The names ‘Domination’, ‘Power’, and ‘Principality’ all involve governance in one way or another.

For it belongs to the lord alone to prescribe what is to be done. And so Gregory says, “Because the others are subject in obedience to them, certain companies of angels are called ‘Dominations’.”

On the other hand, the name ‘Power’ designates a type of ordinance, according to the Apostle in Romans 13:2 (“He who resists the power resists the ordinance of God”). And so Dionysius claims that the name ‘Power’ signifies certain ordinances having to do with the reception of divine gifts and with the

divine actions that higher angels perform on lower angels in order to lead them upward. Therefore, it belongs to the order of Powers to ordain what is to be done by those subject to them.

Finally, as Gregory says, to rule (*principari*) is to be prior among the others in the sense that the Principalities (*principatus*) are the first ones involved in the execution of what is commanded. And so in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 9, Dionysius says that the name ‘Principalities’ signifies “one who leads with a sacred ordinance.” For those who lead others and are first among them are properly called ‘princes’ (*principes*) according to Psalm 67:26 (“Princes went before joined with singers”).

Reply to objection 4: According to Dionysius, the Archangels lie midway between the Principalities and the Angels. Now when what lies in the middle is compared to one of the endpoints, it seems like the other endpoint, since it participates in the nature of both. For instance, what is tepid is cold compared to what is hot, but it is hot compared to what is cold. So, too, the Archangels are called the ‘angel princes’ because they are rulers when compared to the Angels, though they are Angels when compared to the Principalities.

On the other hand, according to Gregory, the Archangels are so named from the fact that they rule only over the order of Angels, announcing great things to them, whereas the Principalities are so named from the fact that they rule over all the heavenly powers who carry out God’s decrees.

Reply to objection 5: The name ‘Seraphim’ is imposed not only on the basis of charity, but on the basis of a surpassing degree of charity, which is implied by the name ‘ardent’ or ‘on fire’. Hence, in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 7, Dionysius explains the name ‘Seraphim’ in terms of the properties of fire, in which there is a surpassing degree of heat. Now there are three things we can consider in fire. The first thing to consider is fire’s motion, which is upward and continuous. This signifies that the Seraphim move unswervingly toward God. The second thing to consider is fire’s active power, which is heat. It is found in fire not just simply speaking, but with a certain sharpness, since it penetrates the action to the greatest degree and reaches to the smallest things; again, heat is found in fire with a certain surpassing fervor. This signifies the action, exercised with great power on those below them, by which angels of this type excite the lower angels to a similar fervor and fully cleanse them by their flame. The third thing to consider in fire is its brightness. This signifies that angels of this sort have within themselves an inextinguishable light and that they illuminate others perfectly.

Similarly, the name ‘Cherubim’ is imposed on the basis of a certain excellence in knowledge, which is interpreted as a fullness of knowledge. Dionysius explains this in terms of four points: first, in terms of the perfect vision of God; second, in terms of the full reception of divine light; third, in terms of the fact that the Cherubim contemplate within God Himself the beauty in the order of the things derived from God; and, fourth, in terms of the fact that, filled with this type of cognition, they pour it out copiously upon the other angels.

Reply to objection 6: The order of the Thrones exceeds the lower orders in the fact that the Thrones can discern directly in God the reasons behind God’s works, whereas the Cherubim have an excellence in knowledge and the Seraphim have an excellence in ardor. And though the third excellence is included in these latter two excellences, still, the other two are not included in the excellence that belongs to the Thrones. And this is the way in which the order of the Thrones is distinguished from the order of the Seraphim and the order of the Cherubim. For it is generally true of all the orders that the excellence had by a lower order is contained in the excellence had by a higher order, but not vice versa.

Now Dionysius explains the name ‘Thrones’ by the likeness of the Thrones to material chairs. There are four things to consider in chairs. The first is their position, since chairs are elevated above the ground. And so the angels who are called Thrones are elevated to the point that they know directly in God the reasons behind things. The second thing to consider in material chairs is their firmness, since one sits firmly on them. Here, however, we have the converse, since these angels are themselves firmed up by God. The third thing to consider is that a seat receives the one who sits on it, and he can be carried

on it. So, too, these angels receive God into themselves and in a certain sense carry Him to the lower angels. The fourth thing to consider is the shape of the chair, since a chair is open on one side to receive the one who sits on it. So, too, these angels are, through their promptitude, open to receiving God and serving Him.

Article 6

Are the grades of the orders appropriately assigned?

It seems that the grades of the orders are not appropriately assigned:

Objection 1: The order of prelates seems to be the highest. But the Dominations, Principalities, and Powers imply a certain order of precedence (*praelationem*) by their very names. Therefore, these orders ought to be the highest of all.

Objection 2: The closer an order is to God, the higher it is. But the order of Thrones seems to be closest to God, since nothing is joined more closely to the one who sits than his chair is. Therefore, the order of Thrones is the highest.

Objection 3: Knowledge is prior to love, and the intellect seems to be higher than the will. Therefore, it seems that the order of Cherubim is higher than the order of Seraphim.

Objection 4: Gregory puts the Principalities above the Powers. Therefore, they are not, as Dionysius claims, immediately above the Archangels.

But contrary to this: In the first hierarchy Dionysius places the Seraphim first, the Cherubim in the middle, and the Thrones last. In the middle hierarchy, he places the Dominations first, the Virtues in the middle, and the Powers last. And in the last hierarchy, he places the Principalities first, the Archangels in the middle, and the Angels last.

I respond: In assigning the grades of the angelic orders, Gregory and Dionysius agree on all the others but differ with respect to the Virtues and the Principalities. For Dionysius places the Virtues under the Dominations and above the Powers, and he places the Principalities under the Powers and above the Archangels. Gregory, on the other hand, places the Principalities between the Dominations and the Powers, and he places the Virtues between the Powers and the Archangels.

Both of these assignments can draw support from the authority of the Apostle. In Ephesians 1:20-21, while enumerating the middle orders of angels in ascending order, the Apostle says, "God set [Christ] at His right hand in the heavenly places, above every Principality and Power and Virtue and Domination," and so here he places the Virtues between the Powers and the Dominations, in keeping with Dionysius's assignment. However, in Colossians 1:16, enumerating the same orders in descending order, he says, "Through Him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers," where he places the Principalities between the Dominations and the Powers, in keeping with Gregory's assignment.

Let us look first at the reasons behind Dionysius's assignment. Notice that, as was explained above (a. 1), the first hierarchy grasps the reasons behind things in God Himself, whereas the second hierarchy grasps them in their universal causes, and the third hierarchy grasps them insofar they are narrowed down to specific effects. And since God is the end not only of the angelic ministries but of the totality of creatures, the consideration of *the end* belongs to the first hierarchy, *the general arrangement of works to be done* pertains to the second hierarchy, and *the application of this arrangement to specific effects*, i.e., the execution of the works, belongs to the last hierarchy. For it is clear that these three components are found in every operation. So Dionysius, taking into account the properties of the orders suggested by

their names, placed in the first hierarchy those orders whose names are imposed with respect to God Himself, viz., the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and the Thrones. Then he placed in the middle hierarchy those orders whose names designate a certain sort of general governance or planning, viz., the Dominations, the Virtues, and the Powers. Finally, he placed in the third hierarchy those orders whose names designate the execution of a work, viz., the Principalities, the Angels, and the Archangels.

Now there are three things that can be considered in relation to the *end*: first, someone thinks about the end; second, he acquires a complete cognition of the end; and, third, he fixes his intention on the end. The second of these points adds to the first, and the third adds to the first two. Since God is the end of creatures in the way that, as *Metaphysics* 12 says, a leader is the end of his army, an example of this order can be found in human affairs. For there are some who rank highly enough to be able to approach the king or leader by themselves with familiarity, whereas, beyond this, there are others who rank highly enough to know his secrets, and again, beyond this, there are still others who always accompany him as if attached to him. By keeping this example in mind, we can grasp the arrangement of the orders in the first hierarchy. For the Thrones are elevated to the point of receiving God within themselves in a familiar way, insofar as they are able to discern the reasons behind things directly in Him—an ability which is proper to the whole first hierarchy. On the other hand, the Cherubim know divine secrets in a preeminent way, whereas the Seraphim excel in the highest of all things, viz., being united to God Himself. So, then, the order of Thrones is named on the basis of what is common to the whole first hierarchy, in the same way that the order of Angels is named on the basis of what is common to all the heavenly spirits.

Next, there are three things that belong to the notion of *governance*. The first is to decree the works that are to be done, and this is proper to the Dominations. The second is to bestow the power to carry out those works, and this pertains to the Virtues. The third is to determine how the works that are commanded or decreed can be carried out in the sense of someone's executing them, and this pertains to the Powers.

Finally, the *execution* of angelic ministries consists in announcing divine things. Now in the execution of any act, there are some who initiate the action and lead the others—e.g., cantors in the case of singing, and those who lead and direct others in the case of war—and this pertains to the Principalities. On the other hand, there are some who simply carry out the commands, and this pertains to the Angels. And as was explained above (a. 5), there are others who stand in the middle, and this pertains to the Archangels.

Now this assignment of the orders is fitting. For in every case the highest member of a lower order has an affinity with the last member of the next higher order, just as the lowest animals are very close to plants. The first order is that of the divine persons and it is terminated with the Holy Spirit, who is the Love who proceeds and with whom the highest order of the first hierarchy of angels has an affinity, since it is named from the ardor of love (*ab incendio amoris*). But the lowest order of the first hierarchy is the Thrones, who, given their name, have an affinity with the Dominations, since, according to Gregory, it is through the Thrones that God exercises His judgments. For the Thrones receive divine illuminations in a way that makes it appropriate for them to directly illuminate the second hierarchy, which has the role of arranging the divine ministries. Moreover, the order of Powers has an affinity with the order of Principalities. For given that the Powers impose ordinances on those subject to them, these ordinances are directly assigned in the name of the Principalities, who are first in the execution of the divine ministries—presiding, for instance, over the governance of nations and kingdoms, which is the first and principal domain in the divine ministries, since the good of a nation is more divine than the good of an individual man. Hence, Daniel 10:13 says, “The prince of the kingdom of the Persians resisted me ...”

The arrangement of the orders posited by Gregory also has a sort of fittingness. For since the Dominations are the ones who decree and prescribe what pertains to the divine ministries, the orders subject to them are deployed according to the arrangement of those on whom the divine ministries are

exercised. For as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 3, “Corporeal things are ruled in a certain order, the lower by the higher and all of them by spiritual creatures; and the bad spirits are ruled by the good spirits.” Therefore, the first order after the Dominations is called the Principalities, who also rule over the good spirits. Then come the Powers, through whom the bad spirits are warded off, just as, according to Romans 13:3-4, evildoers are warded off by earthly powers. After the Powers come the Virtues, which have power over corporeal nature in the working of miracles. And after the Virtues come the Archangels and Angels, who announce to men either great things, i.e., things that are beyond reason, or small things, which reason can grasp.

Reply to objection 1: Among the angels, the fact that they are subject to God is more significant than the fact that they preside over lower creatures, and the latter is derived from the former. And so the orders that take their names from an order of presiding are not the highest orders; instead, the highest orders are the ones that take their names from their turning toward God.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, the closeness to God that is designated by the name of the Thrones belongs also to the Cherubim and the Seraphim, and in a more excellent way.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 27, a. 3), cognition occurs insofar as the things that are known exist in the knower, whereas love occurs insofar as the lover is united to the thing loved. Now higher things exist in themselves in a more noble way than they do in lower things, whereas lower things exist in a more noble way in higher things than they do in themselves. And so knowing lower things is better than loving them, whereas loving higher things, and principally God, is better than knowing them.

Reply to objection 4: If the arrangements of the orders given by Dionysius and Gregory are carefully considered, they differ very little or not at all as far as the reality is concerned. For Gregory takes the name ‘Principalities’ to refer to those who preside over the good spirits, and this meaning belongs to the Virtues to the extent that the name ‘Virtues’ implies a strength that gives efficacy to the lower spirits in carrying out their divine ministries. Again, Gregory’s understanding of the Virtues seems to be the same as Dionysius’s understanding of the Principalities. For the first among the divine ministries is the working of miracles, since it is through the working of miracles that the way is prepared for the announcements made by the Archangels and Angels.

Article 7

Will the orders of angels remain after judgment day?

It seems that the orders of angels will not remain after judgment day:

Objection 1: In 1 Corinthians 15:24 the Apostle says that Christ “will bring to naught every Principality and Power and Virtue, when He will have handed over the kingdom to God and the Father”—which will occur in the final consummation of things. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, in that state all the other orders will be brought to naught as well.

Objection 2: The role of the angels is to cleanse, to illuminate, and to perfect. But after judgment day it is not the case that one angel will be cleansing, illuminating, or perfecting another, since none of them will make any further progress in knowledge. Therefore, it would be pointless for the angelic orders to remain.

Objection 3: In Hebrews 1:14 the Apostle says of the angels, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for the sake of those who receive the inheritance of salvation?” It is clear from this that the roles of the angels are ordered toward leading men to salvation. But all of the elect pursue salvation

up to and before judgment day. Therefore, the roles of angels and their orders will not remain after judgment day.

But contrary to this: Judges 5:20 says, “The stars, remaining in their order and course ...”—and this is interpreted as being about the angels. Therefore, the angels will always remain in their orders.

I respond: There are two things to consider in the angelic orders, viz., (a) the distinction among the grades and (b) the execution of their roles.

As was explained above (a. 4), the distinction among the grades derives from differences in grace and nature. And both of these sorts of differences will always remain in the angels. For the differences among the natures could not be removed from them without their being corrupted, whereas the differences in glory will always remain in them in a way corresponding to the differences in their prior merit.

On the other hand, after judgment day the execution of the angelic roles will remain in some ways and cease in other ways. The execution of the roles will cease to the extent that the roles of the angels are ordered toward leading certain men to their end, but it will remain to the extent that it is consonant with the ultimate attainment of the end—just as the roles of the military orders in battle differ from their roles in victory.

Reply to objection 1: The Principalities and Powers will be brought to naught in the final consummation as far as their leading others to their end is concerned. For once the end has already been attained, it is no longer necessary to tend toward the end. This meaning can be gleaned from the very words of the Apostle, who says, “..... when He will have handed over the kingdom to God and the Father,”—that is, when He will have led the faithful to the enjoyment of God Himself.

Reply to objection 2: The actions of the angels with respect to other angels should be thought of along the lines of the intelligible actions that exist in us.

For in our case there are many intelligible actions that are ordered in the manner of a cause and what is caused—as, for instance, when we reach a conclusion by going step by step through a series of middle terms. Now it is clear that the cognition of the conclusion depends on all the preceding middle terms—and not just with respect to the new *acquisition* of knowledge, but also with respect to the *conservation* of the knowledge. An indication of this is that if someone forgot one of the preceding middle terms, he would be able to have an opinion (*opinio*) about the conclusion or to have faith (*fides*) with respect to it, but he would not be able to have knowledge (*scientia*) of it, since he would not know the order of the causes.

So, then, since the lower angels know the reasons behind God’s works through the light of the higher angels, their cognition of those reasons depends upon the light of the higher angels not only with respect to the *acquisition* of new knowledge but also with respect to the *conservation* of their knowledge. Therefore, even though the lower angels do not make progress in the knowledge of anything after the judgment, this does not rule out their being illuminated by the higher angels.

Reply to objection 3: Even though, after judgment day, men are no longer going to be led to salvation through the ministry of the angels, nonetheless, those who have already attained salvation will have some illumination through the roles of the angels.

Article 8

Are men assumed into the angelic orders?

It seems that men are not assumed into the angelic orders:

Objection 1: The human hierarchy is located under the lowest of the heavenly hierarchies, just as the lowest heavenly hierarchy is located under the middle hierarchy and the middle hierarchy under the first hierarchy. But the angels of the lowest hierarchy are never transferred to the middle or first hierarchy. Therefore, neither are men transferred into the orders of the angels.

Objection 2: Certain roles—e.g., guarding, working miracles, warding off demons, etc.—belong to the orders of angels. But these roles do not seem appropriate for the souls of the saints. Therefore, the saints are not transferred into the orders of angels.

Objection 3: Demons induce men to evil in the same way that the good angels induce them to good. But it is erroneous to claim that the souls of bad men are converted into demons; for Chrysostom rejects this claim in his commentary on Matthew. Therefore, it does not seem that the souls of the saints are transferred into the orders of angels.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 22:30 our Lord says of the saints that “they will be like the angels of God in heaven.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 4), the orders of angels are distinguished both by their natural condition and by the gifts of grace. Thus, if we think of the orders of angels only in terms of the grade of nature, then there is no way that men can be assumed into the orders of angels, since the distinction between their natures will always remain.

Some, taking this into account, have claimed that there is no sense in which men can be transferred to an equality with the angels. But this claim is erroneous and conflicts with the promise of Christ, who says at Luke 20:36 that the children of the resurrection will be equal to the angels in heaven. For what stems from nature is, as it were, the material element in the definition of an order of angels, while what stems from the gift of grace—which depends on God’s generosity and not on the order of nature—perfects the material element. And so through the gift of grace men can merit glory in such a way as to be equal to each of the grades of angels, and this is what it is for men to be assumed into the orders of angels.

However, some claim that not all who are saved are assumed into the orders of angels, but only virgins or those who are perfect, whereas the others constitute their own order, which is, as it were, divided off from the whole society of angels. But this is contrary to Augustine, who says in *De Civitate Dei* 12 that there will not be two societies, one of men and one of angels, but one society, “since the beatitude of all of them is to cling to the one God.”

Reply to objection 1: Grace is given to the angels in proportion to their natural gifts, but, as was explained above (a. 4), this is not the way it is with men. And so just as the lower angels cannot be transferred to the natural grade of the higher angels, so neither can they be transferred to the level of grace had by the higher angels. By contrast, men can ascend to the level of grace had by the angels, but not to their grade of nature.

Reply to objection 2: According to the order of nature, the angels lie between us and God. And so, as a general rule, the angels administer not only human affairs but all corporeal affairs. Now saintly men share the same nature with us even after this life. Hence, as a general rule, they do not administer human affairs and they do not preside over the affairs of living things, as Augustine points out in *De Cura Pro Mortuis Agenda*. Yet by a certain special dispensation certain holy people, whether living or dead, are sometimes given roles of this type to exercise—either by working miracles or by warding off demons or something else of this sort, as Augustine says in the same book.

Reply to objection 3: It is not erroneous to claim that men are transferred to the punishment of the demons. However, some have claimed erroneously that the demons are nothing other than the souls of the dead. This is the position Chrysostom was rejecting.