



A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED:  
THE SEVEN ARCHANGELS

ST MARY BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
HILLSBOROUGH NJ  
ADULT EDUCATION SERIES

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The Seven Archangels are often thought of as the “seven angels who stand before God” described in the Book of Revelation, Chapters 8 to 10. Two questions immediately come to mind:

1. What are the names of these Archangels, and
2. Why should such lower ranking angels as archangels stand in the presence of God? Isn't this the prerogative of the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones?

Let's take these one at a time.

The **names** of the seven angels vary from tradition to tradition, and often depends on which version of the Bible you are reading. Protestant Bibles exclude Deutero-Canonical books and therefore only name two archangels: Michael and Gabriel. The latter is deemed to be an Archangel by tradition, as the Bible does not accord him the title of Archangel. The Catholic Bible, which includes the Deutero-Canonical Book of Tobit describes the actions of the Archangel Raphael. Eastern Christian Bibles include the apocryphal book of Second Esdras. This Book provides us with the name of the Archangel Uriel. These four archangels are common to almost all of the lists of the Seven Archangels. The names of the remaining three archangels vary from tradition to tradition, and need not concern us here except to point out their names also end with -el, meaning, of God.

Catholics are of course very familiar with Michael and Gabriel. They are less familiar with Raphael and Uriel. Raphael means “God Heals”. He is introduced in Chapter Three of the Book of Tobit, and works miraculous cures

in the remaining chapters. He is a pivotal character in the book and describes himself in Tobit 12:15 as one of the angels that “presents the prayers of the saints and enters into the presence of the glory of the Holy One.” Raphael is a patron of travelers, doctors, nurses, among others.

Uriel is mentioned in 2 Esdras, a book highly esteemed by many Orthodox Churches. He is sent to be a teacher, explaining the actions of God. Uriel means “fire of God” and appears in many other apocryphal works. Uriel was eventually removed from the list of saints in the Roman Catholic Church due to what was perceived to be excessive devotion to angels. The Eastern Church has always had a much more “porous” list of canonical books. Books such as the Gospel of James, while not in the canonical Bible provides much to our Sacred Tradition concerning the Theotokos. 2 Esdras is such a work. It was contained in the Latin Vulgate, the great translation of St. Jerome. Uriel therefore remains as a saint worthy of *dulia*, or devotion in the Eastern Church.

The traditional list of the nine choirs of angels is attributed to Pseudo-Dionysius who wrote in the fourth or fifth century. Archangels are found near the bottom of the list. How then, could such “low” angels be in the presence of God?

Catholics are often amazed to find out the nine choirs of angels is not the only proposed schema. There are several others, all the result of learned speculation. In short, there is no definitively approved list of the choirs of angels. We traditionally think of archangels being

near the bottom of the list of angels. Yet, St. Michael is presumed to be the leader of the Heavenly Hosts. How can this be?

There are several potential solutions to this problem. The most ingenious is you need to make a distinction between the terms “archangel” and “Archangel”. The former refers to the next to lowest form of angel, while the latter refers to the truly powerful Angels at the head of the celestial hosts. Interestingly enough, the Bible uses the term Archangel twice, and uses the term in the singular. A second theory comes from the Book of Tobit, where Raphael states his job is to present petitions. There is a sense the Archangel may not be continuously before the Beatific Vision. Alas, I fear this question is one we will only find out the final answer to at the day of the Second Coming, when all will be revealed to us.

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