DO ANGELS EXIST?

Letters to the Editor

*Catholic Herald Citizen*

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Dear Editor:

Two articles dealing with exorcism and evil spirits in last week’s “Know Your Faith” page are, in my opinion, misleading.

Both suggest that belief in angels is naïve. According to one: “Job . . . introduced a personification of evil which came to be known variously as Satan or the devil.” According to the other: “the boy’s father thought evil spirits caused sickness . . . This all happened long before scientists discov­ered germs and bacteria and viruses that cause sickness.”

The existence of angels, however, can no more be disproven than proven by science. Science is restricted to the material world, and even to those aspects of the material world which are quantifiable and measurable.

Ignorance of germs no doubt caused earlier generations to attribute much to angels that we attribute to material causes. But it does not follow that because they were mistaken in some instances, they were mistaken in all.

We have, in fact, good reasons for believing in angels.

Mineral, plant, animal, and man form a natural hierarchy which, if continued from man to God, would create, one feels, a gap to be filled.

Angels are found in almost every stratum of biblical tradition. Fr. Castelot is undoubt­edly correct in saying that Israel’s belief in angels was influenced by Persian thought; but this is no reason to deny the truth of Israel’s belief. If everything in scripture that is not the pure Yahwism of Moses were thrown out for this reason, the Bible would be quite a slimmer volume.

Tradition affirming the existence of angels is unanimous from the beginning. The liturgy, too, testifies in the angels’ favor: at many Masses “all the angels and saints” are asked to pray for us.

Lateran Council IV in 1215 asserted that God created “both orders of creation, spiritual and corporeal, that is the angelic order and the earthly . . . the devil and other wicked spirits were, by God, made good by nature, but they of themselves became bad.” Karl Rahner, SJ, believes that this text, as part of the creed of an ecumenical council, is infallible. The first half of it was reaffirmed a hundred years ago by Vatican Council I.

Sincerely,

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