

Concerning Prophets Apostles, Imams And Angels

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Says the Shaykh Abu Ja'far: Our belief concerning the prophets (*anbiya'*) and apostles (*rusul*) and Imams (*hujaj*) is that they are more excellent than angels.² And what the angels said to Allah³ the Mighty and Glorious when He said to them:

“. . . Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth; they said: Wilt thou place therein one who will do mischief therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know what ye know not” (Qur'an 2:30)

Was due to their envy⁴ of Adam. And they did not desire aught except a position higher than their own, for superiority is due to knowledge. Allah, Exalted is He, says:

“And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful” (Qur'an 2:31).

They said:

“Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge save that which Thou hast taught us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower, the Wise” (Qur'an 2:32). “He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that which ye disclose and that which ye hide” (Qur'an 2:33).

Now the superiority of Adam over the angels, on account of his position as *nabi* (prophet), follows from the saying of Allah the Mighty and Glorious:

“Inform them of their names” (Qur'an 2:33).

And among the proofs of the superiority of Adam over the angels is the command of Allah to the angels

to prostrate themselves before Adam, in accordance with His words:

“So the angels fell prostrate, all of them together” (Qur'an 15:30).

And Allah commands prostration only before one who is superior. Their prostration to Allah was due to their utter subjection and obedience, and their prostration to Adam was out of respect for the prophets and Imams whom He had placed in his loins. And the Prophet said: I am superior to Gabriel and Michael and Israfil and to all the angels who are near (to Allah), and I am the best of mankind and the leader (*sayyid*) of the sons of Adam.

And as for the saying of Allah the Glorious and Mighty:

“The Messiah will never scorn to be a slave to Allah, nor will the favored angels” (Qur'an 4: 172).

This does not prove their superiority over Jesus, on whom be peace. Allah the Mighty and Glorious said this only because there are among the people some who believe in the divinity of Jesus and worship him, and these are a class amongst the Christians; and there are others who worship the angels, and they are the Sabaeans and some others.

And Allah the Mighty and Glorious said: **“The Messiah will never scorn to be a slave of Allah...” (Qur'an 4: 172).**

Meaning that the Messiah and those who are worshipped, except Myself, will never scorn to be slaves to Me. Angels are spiritual beings (not possessing gross bodies) and are sinless (*ma'sum*). They never disobey Allah in what He commands them, and act as they are commanded. They neither eat, nor drink; neither pain nor disease ever comes upon them; nor does old age or decrepitude.

Their food and drink consists of the glorification (*tasbih*) and sanctification (*taqdis*) of Allah. (The breath of) their life is the zephyr of the Throne of Allah (*'arsh*); and their beatitude is in (the acquisition) of different kinds of knowledge. Allah the Exalted created them by His Power, in the shape of lights and spirits⁵, as He willed and desired; and each class among them guards a species of created things.

And we asserted the superiority of some (Prophets, Imams) over others (angels) because the position accorded to them amongst the varieties of things created by Allah is greater and more excellent than the position given to angels. And Allah knows best.⁶

1. The best general account is in MC, 197 sqq. Cf. also s. v. Mala'ika, Macdonald in EI, iii. 189.

2. The majority hold that prophets are superior to angels, MC, 200 (citing al-Baghdadi). The Mu'tazilites are divided on this point, loc. cit.; the Imamites hold that the Imams are also superior, ibid., 201. Some extreme Shiites, like the Bazighiya (a group of the Khattabiya), hold themselves more excellent than angels, loc. cit. See also EI, iii. 191.

3. لأن الله عز وجل قال لهم N; و قول الملائكة الله عز وجل لما قال لهم N.

4. Reading with N المتمنى D err. التمنى.

5. MC, 199 (citing Muslim). So generally in tradition, EI, iii. 190. According to the Isma'ilis, angels are of many kinds and ranks, but their essence (jawhar) is the same, Taju 'l- Aqa 'id, `aqida 23 (see FC). They may be likened, as Ivanow says, to laws of nature or natural forces, performing certain duties which are entrusted to them, like causing the spheres, stars, etc., to move in perfect order, FC, no. 88 (the text is fuller than the English summary and should be consulted). Further particulars, FC, pp.56,62,64,67,68n. According to KP, 70,000 angels were created out of the light of the face of `Ali, 87, 88; and `Ali appeared to the Prophet as an exalted angel on the Night of the Ascension, 88. Good human souls later become angels, but bad ones, , diws and ghuls, 92; angels are also hududi din (functionaries of religion), 96; and man possesses the human as well as angelic elements in his nature, 54.

6. Therefore apparently ordinary Shi'ahs are not superior to angels, as the Sunnis hold the faithful to be, MC, 202.

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