



SACRED WINDOWS



Sunday – October 6, 2024

The Fall of the Rebel Angels

Dear Thomas,

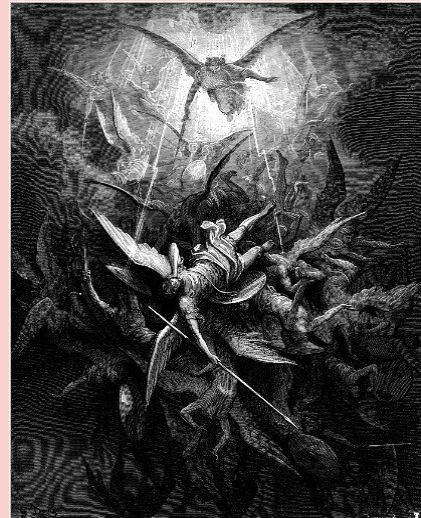
There is a **certain dramatic event** known to our faith that surpasses even the efforts of the best storytellers to depict what really happened. That's because it took place, not in human history, but as the opening act of *salvation history*, before earthly time began.

It was a deadly **conflict of angels**.

Falling Like Lightning

The best description we have of the event had to come from Scripture, that is, from God Himself, who was witness to the war. (Photo at right: *Gustave Doré, 1781*)

The story takes up the whole of **Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation**, and it is extremely cryptic. It gives only the broad strokes. I don't think the human mind can really comprehend the nature or ferocity of what took place.



Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it. (Rev 12:7-9)

Perhaps you recall the words of Jesus to His disciples when he told them that **He saw Satan** "fall like lightning from the sky" (Lk 10:18).

That might have been the devil's real-time reaction to the disciples' initial preaching of the Good News, but it is equally possible that Jesus "saw" this scene with His divine eyes before time began **because He was there when it happened**.

Our Blessed Guardian Angels

The story does, however, give us a window of understanding into the Church's teaching about **guardian angels**. Something at the end of the same chapter gives us a clue:

When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child....Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus. (Rev 12:13.17)



After the demons' expulsion, **the deadly conflict of angels** takes place, not in heaven, but on earth. It is the primary reason to be grateful that God has sent His Guardian Angels to protect us!

"If the devil could do as much harm as he wished," said St. Augustine, *"there would be no just man in the world."* In essence, without the Guardian Angels, no human could survive the seductions of the fallen angels to evil, and he is right.

The Church's teaching, as always, gives us hope. It acknowledges that the devil and his minions are powerful but also that they are **subordinated to the power of the holy angels** who work constantly to assure our protection from spiritual evil in this world.

I told you it was **an amazing history!** Romans, Rabbis, Greeks, Crusaders, Muslims, Ottoman Turks, Arabs and Israelis all inhabited the territory of Jesus' family through the centuries. Wow!

But why is all this history important? Mainly because Our Savior probably spent time with His family there and **consecrated the ground by His very presence**. Here's what I think might have happened.

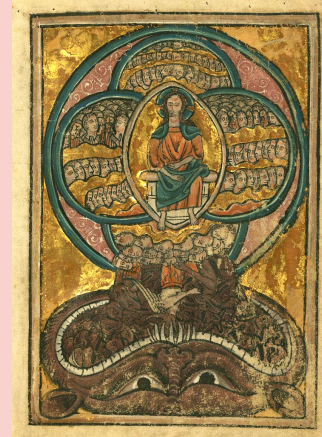
The Fall of the Angels in Art

Hollywood depicts all kinds of fallen human beings, but it seems harder for them to make movies about fallen angels. I think it's because **the Hollywood elites** don't want to cast a negative light on the spirits they worship, but that's just my opinion. Nowadays, Hollywood is making plenty of occult-themed movies, which is not the least bit positive for our culture.

Thankfully, real **Christian artists through the ages** have not shied away from the topic and have depicted it for what it was: the punishment of God's firstborn sons for their apostasy. In fact, it's one of the **favorite themes of medieval and Renaissance art** which should not surprise us because those were ages of faith.

(Medieval manuscript at right depicting the Fall of the Rebel Angels, ca. 1290 AD. Notice the open jaws at the bottom.)

Christian artists painted the conflict with a high degree of religious imagination and artistic ingenuity, and you can't blame them. It's a dramatic scene, isn't it? It also **fit perfectly with the preaching of hellfire and brimstone** in the ages before most priests forgot that Hell exists.



The real masters of this theme were **the dour Northern Europeans** (German, Flemish, and Dutch) who loved depicting the gore with intense detail and color. My favorite is by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (Netherlands, 1562), who holds nothing back in his amazing canvas.



Bruegel's St. Michael stands in the middle of the scene (with the flowing blue cape) hacking away at Satan while **his companion archangels in white on either side of him** expel the other hideous rebels from heaven. It's a little hard to decipher the internal chaos of the scene without looking at it very closely, but its demonic depictions are accurate to the theme and quite brilliant.

It's a universal theme. The story of the fall of the angels is not explicitly told in the Hebrew Bible, but it is very graphically recounted in the **Jewish apocalyptic literature** such as the *Book of Enoch* and the *Book of Parables*. Numerous places in the Islamic Koran recount stories of the fall or the punishment of the rebellious angels as well.



Ceiling of Altenburg Abbey, Austria, 1733



Hieronymus Bosch, 1516

The Amazing Sculpture

I've reserved my greatest words of admiration for the best work on this theme, which is an **extraordinary sculpture** called, the "Fall of the Rebel Angels."

If you can imagine someone carving Peter Bruegel's chaotic scene into a **three-dimensional piece of marble**, then you will not be surprised that it was done by a Venetian artist named Francesco Bertos, who sculpted it sometime between 1725 and 1730. Italians were the

unqualified masters of the art.

I'm sure you'll agree with me that this work is **utterly astonishing**. If a picture paints a thousand words, as they say, a walk-around sculpture probably paints ten thousand.



It's hard to see in perspective, but **the sculpture stands five-and-a-half feet high**, the normal height of a man in Bertos's time. Its base is nearly three feet wide (32 inches).

In the mentality of the age, such intricate works were **thought to be humanly impossible to create**. Because of that, Bertos was actually accused of witchcraft in 1737! He proved his accusers wrong by carving a similar sculpture right before the eyes of the **judges of the**

Inquisition—pretty impressive. Now, let's look a little more closely at some details.

Defiance and Punishment



At left: St. Michael the Archangel stands at the very pinnacle of this pyramid, identified by the words on his shield: "*Quis ut Deus*" ("**Who is like unto God?**") In Hebrew the phrase is pronounced as Mi-cha-el, the archangel's name.

At right: That phrase is Michael's battle cry against Lucifer, who is depicted as wearing a crown and standing at the very bottom of the pit **pointing his finger up at God in defiance**.



Gratitude to the Gallerie d'Italia, Vicenza (Intesa Sanpaolo Collection) for permission to use these three photos, above and below. See full credits at end.

The movement of Michael at the top **chopping down with his sword** is deliberately juxtaposed against the movement of the Evil One raising his arm in blasphemy against his Creator. And Michael will have none of it. Hence, **the angelic conflict** is written into the very marble.

The Theology of the Fall

Then there is a certain theological point that Bertos made with these figures which tracks perfectly with the Church's teaching about the demons' **rejection of God's grace**.

Look closely at the **transformations** of the apostate angels *into demons* as they are falling out of heaven:

- Horns are emerging from their heads;

- Hair starts to resemble **reptilian scales**;
- Tails and **bat-like wings** spring from their backs;
- Fire issues from a few of their mouths, and
- Most of them, if not all, are **screaming in terror**.

You will also notice **snakes** winding in and through sculpture, some of which are biting at the fallen angels.

[The video below shows many more close-up details of the sculpture, and I highly recommend taking 4 minutes to view it.]



Perversions of Nature

This incredible sculpture paints a more vivid picture of the tortures of the damned than a thousand sermons could. The theological point, however, is even more precise than just the general suffering of those who choose hell. It is this: the rejection of God's grace **drastically distorts even the gifts of nature**.

Case in point: the grace-filled beauty of the holy angels is so ravishing that humans can barely stand to see their glory. In contrast, the **demons have hideously perverted features** that literally transform their glorious nature into the semblance of creatures lower than the animals.



The paragon of this awful transformation is Lucifer himself who once was the most glorious angel in heaven. In Revelation, his true face comes to light: **he turned into a revolting and malevolent dragon** in whom is found no goodness whatsoever.

Our theology also says the **fallen angels cannot repent of their evil** because their wills are fixed in defiance. That is a result of the ferocity of their angelic wills, which are unchangeable once they make a decision. Their rejection of God is total and irrevocable.

In other words, **sculpture is a more fitting medium** than a painting to depict their fate because the free choice they made to reject God is literally *set in stone*.

Feature Video

There is a **fabulous 360-degree video** of this sculpture at the [Gallerie d'Italia website](#).

Please scroll to the second video on that page, it is less than 4 minutes and **utterly incredible!**

[360-Degree View Video of the Sculpture](#)



A Word of Gratitude

I wish to sincerely thank all those Sacred Windows readers who responded to my **appeal via the Substack** email last week. Your generosity is greatly, greatly appreciated and will sustain this work for many months to come. And the books are in the mail!

Gratefully,

Peter Darcy

Visit the Newsletter Archives

Photo Credits: Courtesy of the Intesa Sanpaolo Collection, Francesco Bertos (documented from 1706 to 1739), Fall of the Rebel Angels, 1725-1735, Carrara marble, 168 x 80 x 81 cm, Gallerie d'Italia – Vicenza, Credits: Archivio Patrimonio Artistico Intesa Sanpaolo / ph Valter Maino, Vicenza.

Other Photos: Man standing next to sculpture ([Artifacts Museum](#)); Feature: Michael with Sword ([Dosso Dossi](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons); Guardian Angel ([Nheyob](#)); Altenburg Abbey ([Wolfgang Sauber](#)); Pieter Brueghel the Elder ([Public domain](#), via Wikimedia Commons); Hieronymus Bosch ([Haywain Tryptich](#)); Gustave Dore ([Public domain](#)); Medieval ([William de Brailes](#)); Devil under foot ([Josse Lieferinxe](#)); End Photo (El Club del Arte_FB Page).

TO CONTACT PETER:

Email: peterdarcy@sacredwindows.com

Author's Website: <https://petedarcywriting.com>

Substack Page: [Sacred Windows Vignettes](#)



Peter Darcy / Sacred Windows | PO Box 346 | Port Salerno, FL 34992 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!