

The title *St Michael* means *he who is like God*. Michael was known to the prophet Daniel in ancient Israel and he has been venerated by all the churches from the beginning. The early Greek Fathers called him *Chief Militant* and *Archistrategos* – literally *the General Officer Commanding*. The Egyptian Christians long ago dedicated the Nile as *St Michael's River*. And when Germany was converted from paganism, all the mountains dedicated to Wotan were re-consecrated to Michael. That's why there are so many chapels to St Michael on mountain peaks in Germany. Wagner ought to have noticed that before he wrote his pagan epic

Most vividly, St Michael is the Archangel of the Apocalypse: *There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon*. War in heaven? There's a thought for the manufacturers of religious greetings cards. St Michael, you might say, is not the favourite saint of our bishops and synods who are still urging us to apologise for every military campaign back as far as Trafalgar and even the Crusades.

Those who take the cosy view of angels, seeing them as effeminate creatures with embroidered wings, are really away with the fairies. We should remind them of Our Lord's saying that he came not to bring peace but a sword. That he urges us to spiritual warfare, promising that the gates of hell will not prevail.

We have a reminder of Christian warfare in our bell tower. There's a scar on the wall where it is said St Michael attacked the devil who was trying to get in. I've heard sceptics say to me over the years: *It wasn't done by St Michael – it was a bolt of lightning*. Where do these people keep their imagination? What do they think St Michael uses, for heaven's sake! Lightning is the first item in the Archangel's armoury.

All right, so if there is holy warfare where's the enemy? We are told about the enemy in the Epistle of Jude – the shortest book in the New Testament. It fits on to one page of the Bible. Have a look at it when you get home. We are told how to identify the enemies of Christ: *they are filthy dreamers who defile the flesh, despise dominion and speak evil of dignities...brute beasts who corrupt themselves...these says St Jude are the spots in your feasts of charity...clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead...wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever*

So we are told our Christian warfare is against those who *defile the flesh*. It sounds terribly old fashioned, doesn't it – until you take a look at what's available on the telly and the Internet. Or you venture – foolishly – into any of our town centres in the evenings. We inhabit the consumerism of hell where all the sins have been redefined as *lifestyle choices*. And then the Epistle warns of those who *despise dominion and speak evil of dignities*. Old fashioned, is it? – when *deference* is sneered at as *outdated* by the jabs who run the mass media. *Brute beasts who corrupt themselves?* – just walk as far as the Tottenham Court Road.

Now St Jude's Epistle may be short, but he mentions St Michael. And what he has to say ought to interest us. He refers to a dispute between St Michael and the devil over the location of the tomb of Moses. In the Hebrew tradition no one knows where this

tomb is. The devil is threatening to reveal it. Why? So that the people will turn to hero worship, put neon signs over Moses' tomb as a tourist attraction, let the cash registers roll and exploit Moses as a celeb. St Michael will have none of this. He knows the significance of Moses as the giver of God's Law and will not have him turned into a personality cult.

Do not think that angels and devils, St Michael and Satan, are mere metaphors – picture language. Just because they are usually invisible doesn't mean they are not real. They are real and they are at war. Now the devil creates nothing original. God is the only Creator. The devil can only copy God's actions, befouling them as he goes along. So the devil is called the Ape of God. The devil is hard at work aping God all the time:

He can't give you love; but he can give you a disordered sexual appetite. He cannot give you *the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other*; but he can give you *Put yourself about a bit; wear a condom!*

The devil can't give you art; but he can give you animals in formaldehyde and an unmade bed.

He can't give you music; but he can give you the noise that passes for it, the ubiquitous 24/7 racket of rock and pop.

He can't build Chartres cathedral; but he built the South Bank

The devil cannot give you the gift of statesmanship; but he can give you party conferences with speeches full of mawkish self-reference and narcissism, with whirling captions and a cacophonous soundtrack

He can't give you friendship; but he can give you as many social networking sites as you want. On any one of these you can advertise your upcoming act of mass murder.

For the devil a pregnancy is a failed abortion.

He can't give you *Honour thy father and thy mother*; but he does drag Baroness Warnock along to say that it's OK to kill them off when they become a nuisance.

He can't give you *Sabbath rest by Galilee*; but he can provide seven day shopping.

He can't give you wisdom, sound knowledge or even good teaching; but he can peddle slogans and sound bites about *delivering excellence to every school*.

The devil can't even give us a decent game of cricket; only a barbarous parody of the game and make you play it in your pyjamas again to the relentless background of pop.

The devil can't give you the beauty of holiness; but he can give you the Bad News Bible, doggerel modern services and, just when you're trying to say your prayers, the rowdy interruption called the Peace

The devil can't teach you to pray; but he provides lots of psychoanalysis, counselling and navel-gazing.

He can't create a park; but he has created hundreds of theme parks

He can't show you the glory of the night sky; but he can provide any number of night clubs

God gives us the truth that can set us free; the devil gives us TV chat shows

But the devil *can* give you eternal life; the catch is that you have to spend it with him.

*Seeing we are beset by the crafts and assaults of the devil, give us, we beseech thee O Lord, the mighty protection of St Michael and all the holy angels that we may resist the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil and serve thee with a quiet mind.*