

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**A Paean to the Martyrs**      Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael      Tuesday,  
September 29, 2015 8:15 AM **Rv 12:7-12ab**; Jn 1:47-51 (Those who have martyred  
themselves with Christ, for Christ, have defeated the devil with Christ. It's really his blood  
that made it possible, but also their blood.

So today we are celebrating the feast of the three great archangels: Michael, Gabriel,  
Raphael.

The idea of **angels or spirit beings** is very common in ancient literature and in the Old  
Testament, but not too common. It's there; but it isn't, let's say, excessive. **Originally it was  
Yahweh himself who was the angel of Israel, *Malak Israel*.** It was Yahweh. Yahweh  
appeared to Adam and Eve in the garden and walked with them. Yahweh appeared to  
Abraham in the heat of the day, wrestled with Jacob, and so on. But later on the theology, if  
you want to call it that, **the religious thinking of the Jewish teachers, tended to  
disapprove of such intimacy and the idea of angels became more prominent.**

Originally **Yahweh himself, who is the creator of the angels**—Yahweh means “the one  
who causes to be,” so Yahweh *Elohim* means “the one who causes the gods be,” gods being  
these spirit beings. Yahweh *Sabaoth* means “the one who causes the heavenly hosts to be.”  
So Yahweh originally **was seen as ruling over all creation with all these assistants**, much  
as a temporal king or ruler would have all this retinue of servants. That's the idea. Except  
when it came to being a messenger, **Yahweh himself did the messaging, at least to Israel,**  
and then assigned other spirit beings to other nations. And for some unexplainable reason  
kept this personal relationship with Israel special. Again, this is never explained; it's simply  
described.

But now we are talking about Michael, and Michael is mentioned in both the Book of  
Daniel and in the Book of Revelation and various other places. I was quite surprised Sunday.

I was listening to the FM channel. It was choral and organ music, and the announcer said, well, this week we are celebrating *Michaelmas*, and St. Michael was the great archangel who defeated Lucifer. And I thought, how did he ever get that idea? Well, it's from **misreading today's passage from Revelation**. It can be misread. It says this: "War broke out in the heavens." So this idea of cosmic warfare explaining the origin of evil, this is really where this comes from. "Michael and his angels battled against the dragon"—that's the evil one "The dragon and his 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." **So the impression would be given that because Michael was fighting, that Michael did this.**

**But that's not what the text says.** It goes on: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. They conquered him'—now who is "they"?—'by the Blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love her life did not deter them from death.'" So it's not talking about angels. **It's talking about the martyrs.** This is a paean to the martyrs, **that those who have martyred themselves with Christ, for Christ, have defeated the devil with Christ. It's really his blood that made it possible, but also their blood.** That's what this is about. It's not about St. Michael at all. But that announcer did not read this very carefully, and made assumptions, which I think we often do. But the original author's real intent is to talk about **how important it is to witness to Christ. He shed his blood; we shed our blood; evil is overcome. That's the basic idea.**