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THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS; LUCIFER'S PRESENCE IN MICHELANGELO'S
CREATION OF ADAM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the idea of Lucifer's presence in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. In this famous scene, God the Father is shown at the moment of putting life into Adam through his outstretched finger, and is surrounded by a group of Angels, as well some other figures who have been identified, in recent times, as Eve and the Christ Child. Expanding on some ideas proposed by Leo Steinberg in 1992, I propose that a blonde, shadowy figure to the right of Eve represents the angel Lucifer before his fall. In the process, I argue that Michelangelo conceived this scene of human creation to allude to a series of related moments in Biblical history, beginning with the creation of Adam which led to the "Fall of the Rebel Angels" and the defeat of Lucifer by the Archangel Michael, continuing with Lucifer's Temptation of Eve and the Fall of Man, and culminating with incarnation of the Christ the Redeemer. As we shall see, all of these characters are placed strategically (and suggestively) in the scene of Adam's creation, and because of Lucifer, all of them came to be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	iii
Chapter 1 The Ceiling.....	1
Chapter 2 The Scene.....	6
The Characters.....	8
Chapter 3 The Argument.....	12
Chapter 4 Lucifer.....	13
Physical Characteristics.....	18
Michelangelo's Knowledge of Lucifer.....	23
Lucifer and the Archangel Michael.....	27
Chapter 5 Deeper Meaning of the Scene.....	35
Selection and Placement of Characters.....	36
Why Michelangelo Created This Scene.....	38
Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	40
Bibliography.....	41

List of Figures

Figure 1 Scheme of Michelangelo's Composition of the Sistine Chapel.....	4
Figure 2 Creation of Adam.....	7
Figure 3 Creation of Adam (detail).....	15
Figure 4 Temptation and Expulsion.....	17
Figure 5 Fall of the Rebel Angels.....	19
Figure 6 Original Sin.....	21
Figure 7 Expulsion.....	22
Figure 8 Three Archangels Defeating Lucifer.....	26
Figure 9 St. Michael and the Dragon.....	28
Figure 10 Saint Michael Drives out Lucifer.....	29

Chapter 1

The Ceiling

It is a mind-blowing experience walking into the Sistine Chapel and being bombarded with Michelangelo's masterpiece above you. As soon as you walk through the doors you are forced to immediately look upwards at the ceiling, and your eyes are overwhelmed by the vast array of figures and scenes that appear before you. As you scan the ceiling and jump from one section to another you may wonder to yourself how one man could have had such a cohesive vision; how could one person create such a huge amazing piece of artwork? As you stand there feeling as small and insignificant as possible below the towering figures painted on the ceiling it is virtually impossible to tear your eyes away, but once you get over the overwhelming impact of the ceiling's majesty you may start to analyze each scene more carefully.

Michelangelo's imagination created a piece of artwork at the Sistine Chapel that culminates the entire ceiling and cleverly incorporates the barrel vaulting of the chapel into the design. Ascanio Condivi describes the ceiling in his "authorized" biography in 1520, *The Life of Michelangelo*,

The form of the vault is what is commonly called a barrel vault and its supports are lunettes, which are six along the length and two across the breadth so that the whole vault amounts to two and a half squares. In this space Michelangelo painted principally the Creation of the world, but he went on to embrace almost all the Old Testament. And he divided this work in the following manner: starting from the brackets which support the arches of the lunettes, up to about a third of the arch of the vault, a flat wall is simulated; rising to the top of it are some pilasters and bases simulating marble, which project outward from a plane resembling a parapet, with its corbels below and with other little pilasters above against the same plane, on which

Prophets and Sibyls are seated. Springing from the arches of the lunettes, these first pilasters flank the brackets, excluding, however, a segment of the arches of the lunettes, which is greater than the space contained between them. On the said bases are imitation figures of little nude children in various poses, which, like terms, support a cornice, which surrounds the whole work, leaving the middle of the vault from head to foot like an open sky. This opening is divided into nine bands.¹

Michelangelo creatively incorporated the ceiling's architectural structure into the design while capturing the most important event in history; the creation of the world. As Loren Partridge says in his book in 1996 about the Sistine Chapel ceiling,

Michelangelo, in short, has to an unprecedented degree developed and transcended the tradition of an architectonic vault design in response to the structure of the chapel. In a masterfully balanced synthesis, however, he has incorporated within his design the contradictory traditions of a nonstructural geometrically inscribed surface and an enclosureless heavenly apparition.²

Partridge's description of the Sistine Chapel completely sums up Michelangelo's masterful way of taking an odd shaped surface, like a ceiling, and turning it into a masterpiece. In Howard Hibbard's book in 1985, *Michelangelo: A Brilliant Biography of the Magnificent*

¹ Ascanio Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) 41-42.

² Loren Partridge, *Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel Ceiling, Rome* (New York, NY: George Brazillier, Inc., 1996) 29.

Renaissance Artist, he explains that,” Michelangelo’s decoration of the Sistine ceiling is the most grandiose pictorial ensemble in all of Western art.”³

The program of this masterpiece is composed of alternating paintings of prophets and sibyls on the outside of the vault in the lunettes and nine scenes from Genesis on the central part of the vault (Figure 1). As you observe the ceiling, your eyes move from scene to scene and you are shown the most important moments in early Biblical history, from the *Separation of Light from Darkness* all the way to the *Drunkenness of Noah*.

³ Howard Hibbard, Michelangelo: A Brilliant Biography of the Magnificent Renaissance Artist (London, England: Butler & Tanner Ltd., 1985) 108.

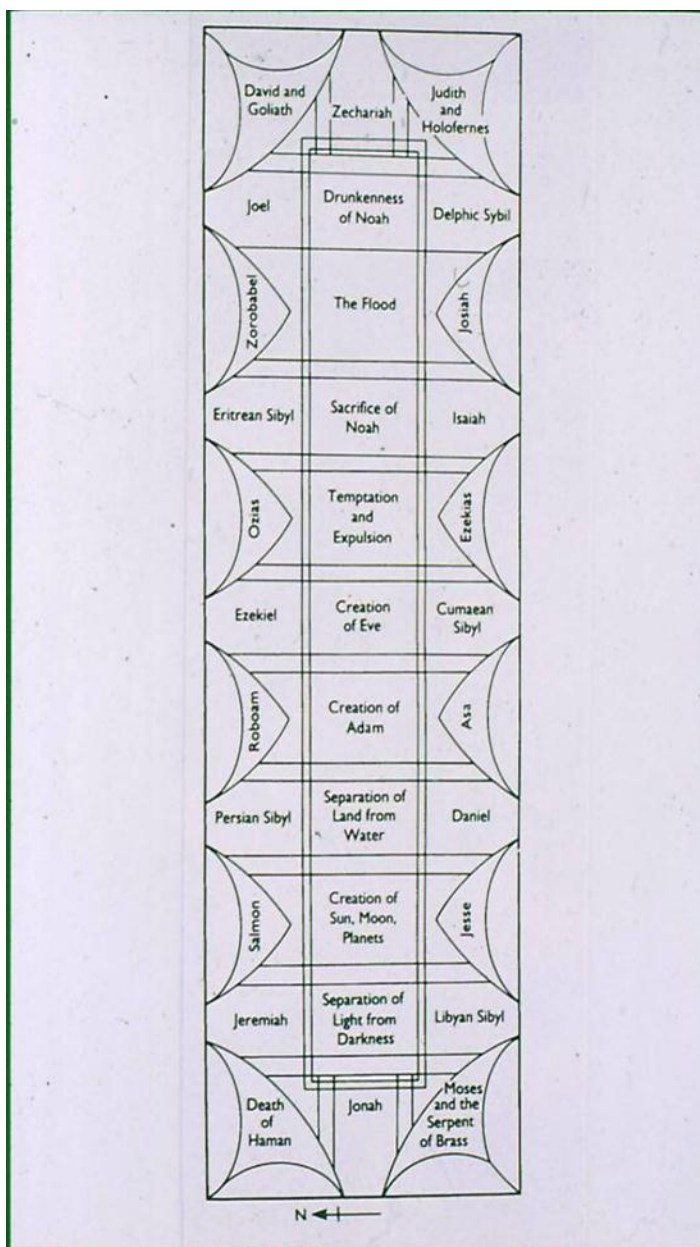


Figure 1: Scheme of Michelangelo's Composition of the Sistine Chapel, April 10, 2011
<http://english.ncu.edu.tw/susanna/images/re/art02/09.JPG>.

However, the scene that has become emblematic of the composition as a whole, the *Creation of Adam* (Figure 2), is the one you will be looking for most intently. And it is no accident that this has become the most famous panel of the all, for, as we shall see, it neatly sums up what has come before it (the creation of the earth and the universe) and points forward to the entire sacred history that follows: the fall, rescue, and ultimate salvation of man through the

incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. At the center of this celebrated scene, the enormous outstretched fingers of both Adam and his Creator capture your attention immediately, creating a dramatic tension, as the almost touching finger of God is about to transmit the charge of life into Adam. It is inevitable, especially given the distance from the floor that these figures should dominate and define the composition as a whole. But in this paper, I am going to ask the reader to consider some of the other figures that appear “on the sidelines,” as it were, of the central action. Who, we might well ask, are the dozen or so figures that fill and surround the cloak of God the Father? These are angels, of course, you might reply, and there is truth in that general response, so far as it goes. A closer look, however, suggests that some more specific identities, including, as I shall argue here, the soon-to-be-created Eve, the rebel angel Lucifer and his nemesis, the Archangel Michael, and even the Child whose incarnation would mark the redemption of Mankind. But let us not get too ahead of our story, and consider, for a moment, the scene as it appears to us in its basic elements.

Chapter 2

The Scene

As the late historian Howard Hibbard describes it, “The Creation of Adam (Figure 2) is perhaps Michelangelo’s most famous image, and rightly, for it seems to express his own galvanic creative power, which encompassed both God and man”.⁴ The image of Adam and God’s fingers so close to touching as the charge is life is transmitted from the creator his creation has become an icon of the Christian faith and the history of Western Art, and can be seen almost anywhere, from t-shirts to the cover of textbooks.

⁴ Hibbard 137.



Figure 2: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Creation of Adam, 1508-1512, Sistine Chapel (Vatican Palace, Vatican City, from Curran, Art H 423 Image Collection.

But there are other details that reward a closer look. For example, if you look closely at the figure of Adam, you will notice that the first man lounges on a patch of earth at the lower left, as if he has been freshly created from the earth. He props himself up on his right elbow and rests his left arm on his knee as his finger reaches towards the outstretched finger of God. The two figures rest in a suspended moment in time, it is where life is about to begin for Adam from the hand of God.

But these figures, dominant as they are, are not alone. Indeed, a glance to the right reveals a host of figures, a virtual heavenly entourage, who swirl around and inside of the

Creator's purplish cloak. If you follow the "creating" finger and right arm of God to the right, you can see that his left arms wraps around the enigmatic figure of a woman, whom Leo Steinberg identified convincingly, in his 1992 article, *Who's who in Michelangelo's Creation of Adam: A Chronology of the Picture's Reluctant Self-Revelation*, as Adam's wife-to-be, Eve. Further to the right, his left hand touches a child-like figure, whom Steinberg identified as the future redeemer, Jesus Christ.⁵ But what of the others? Angels. Presumably: some of them child-like putti, others apparently more mature of body or facial aspect.

The Characters

The Creation of Adam has been admired and studied for many years, but only recently has there been much thought or attention devoted to the identities of these "peripheral" characters. The early biographers, Ascanio Condivi and Giorgio Vasari, describe them only in passing and the most general terms. Vasari's description in his book entitled, *The Lives of the Artists*, written from 1511-1574 is brief, as he explains that "He has represented God carried by a group of nude angels of a tender age who seem to sustain not only one figure but the entire weight of the world".⁶

Condivi is even more economical in his description of the other figures, noting only that in his explanation, "He gathers His little angels around Him",⁷ and Hibbard notes that, "God is evidently supported by wingless angels".⁸ So we see that both Vasari and Condivi, in their summarizing ways, agree that the figures in God's surrounding "entourage" are his angels. These statements seem to be reasonably accurate, so far as they go. But as Leo Steinberg

⁵ Leo Steinberg, "Who's Who in Michelangelo's Creation of Adam: A Chronology of the Picture's Reluctant Self-Revelation," *The Art Bulletin* Dec. 1992: 558.

⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 445.

⁷ Condivi 47.

⁸ Hibbard 137.

suggested in his provocative article, these short descriptions do not necessarily represent the end of the story. Steinberg almost jokingly suggests the presence of two dark angels presumably to be Lucifer and Beelzebub, but he may have unknowingly uncovered a much more intricate idea of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.⁹

Steinberg's "happened upon" theory could have actually uncovered an explanation as to who the characters really are in the scene and ultimately Michelangelo's reasoning behind each character's selection. In his pioneering exploration of the possible identifications of Michelangelo's figures, Leo Steinberg's article identifies a figure that the author believes to be Lucifer. He states that Lucifer is one of the two angels in the bottom left part of the cloud on the side closest to Adam when he says,

Hid in the lower depth of the veil of Heaven (usually called a billowing mantle of cloak) are two dark angles, damnably hard to see, but once spotted, not to be thought away; and the closer you look, the more they distance themselves from the rest of the party...Who might they be? Surely, we are seeing those malign spirits whom envy stirred to rebellion: Lucifer dimmed into Satan and one next subordinate -call him Beelzebub¹⁰

Steinberg argues that his chosen character is identifiable as Lucifer because he observes that these two angels are not looking directly at Adam, but seem to turn away their "cheerless faces" while holding themselves in ungraceful poses that evoke nothing angelic.¹¹

Steinberg also identifies, convincingly, two other characters that appear inside the cloak, to the right of God the father and close to Him: Eve and the Christ Child. In the process, he refutes Howard Hibbard's theory that the woman under God's left arm is the Virgin Mary.¹² Hibbard argues, "God is evidently supported by wingless angels, and his left arm embraces the

⁹ Steinberg 560.

¹⁰ Steinberg 560.

¹¹ Steinberg 560.

¹² Steinberg 558-559.

Immaculate Mary as he touches the unborn baby Jesus.”¹³ Hibbard believes that the woman figure must be Mary because she is paired with a child. However, Steinberg believes that the woman is instead Eve and counters Hibbard’s argument by stating, “For the Trinity’s Second Person bears the epithet “Son of Man” because, born of woman, he is son of Eve.” He goes on to argue that because the child is much larger and out of scale in comparison to the woman, he does not have to be her son. He says, “While his clinging reach links him to the Eve figure as to a mother, his inordinate size in relation to hers denies direct filiation. So that, respecting the visual data, we understand him to be her son, yes, but not in a literal sense.”¹⁴ I agree with Steinberg’s notion that is Eve present in the scene and it is also the Christ child who is being touched by the finger of the arm wrapped around Eve.

Even though I agree with Steinberg’s selection of characters in the scene, I believe that he is mistaken about the location of Lucifer. Instead, I would argue that the male figure, who appears above Eve’s head, to the right of God’s left arm, is a much better match for this crucial figure. I believe that Michelangelo has portrayed Lucifer here in his “angelic” form, prior to his fall from heaven, but in a pose that already anticipates his role in the coming fall of man. Like the “Lucifer” proposed in Steinberg’s reading, he does not focus on the charge of life being infused into Adam. But that does not mean he is ignoring what is going on, for, instead of Adam, he directs his attention to Eve, as he stares down posed as if about to whisper into her ear, as he would in the form of the Serpent in the Garden of Eden (more about this below).

There is one other major character that must be mentioned, and that is the Archangel Michael. Steinberg suggests that the flying angel with a green piece of cloth, acting as the major support for God on the very bottom of the cloak is Michael. According to Dr. Brian Curran, the

¹³ Hibbard 137.

¹⁴ Steinberg 559.

Archangel Michael was a patron and “name” saint for Michelangelo (the artist’s first name means “Michael the Angel”), which would make the inclusion of his figure here a kind of “artist’s signature.”¹⁵ This identification would seem to be supported by the figure’s pose and appearance. Michael is typically rendered as a figure in flight, winged in most cases (although Michelangelo seemed to prefer his angels wingless). He was also commonly paired with his nemesis, Lucifer. Thus there are many “headliners” in this painting; God, Adam, Eve, the Christ child, Lucifer, and the Archangel Michael.

As mentioned before, my proposed Lucifer demonstrates a very telling action of whispering into the ear of Eve. This pose and the intent behind its creation brings forth a very important question; with Lucifer’s presence in the scene, was Michelangelo attempting to depict the rise, fall, and redemption of mankind all in one scene? Could it be possible that he was actually showing this major chain of events in Biblical history?

¹⁵ As suggested by Brian Curran in class and advisory meetings.

Chapter 3

The Argument

That is the argument that I will be attempting to prove in this paper. First, I will show Lucifer's presence in the *Creation of Adam*, and discuss how certain characteristics of the angel above Eve's head give evidence to identify him as Lucifer contrary to the proposed figure of Leo Steinberg's article. With the identification of Lucifer being solved, I will then more importantly argue how Michelangelo purposefully depicted an entire chain of Biblical events all in one scene. Subtly hidden in the scene Michelangelo skillfully shows how mankind rises, falls, and is redeemed all through the placement of characters, and the usage of God's arms to visually display the complete cycle of these events in the scene. Through these visual clues Michelangelo allows us to identify the characters of the scene as well as suggest a much more intricate meaning that frames the scene in relation to a network of related events in sacred history.

Chapter 4

Lucifer

Before one can fully understand the intricacy behind Michelangelo's "true" meaning of the *Creation of Adam* it is important to first identify the major component driving this theory; Lucifer. Lucifer's presence in this scene is very important because his actions were major contributors to the history of mankind. Lucifer played a key role in the chronicle of man's creation and fall, which makes his appearance in this scene more than fitting. But how can we be sure that this was Michelangelo's intention? One way to strengthen the argument is to consider some comparative material.

Some evidence for my argument of Lucifer's alleged presence in the scene can be found in the Scriptures and Christian ideas in *Isaiah 14:12-15* and *Revelation 12:7-9* which discuss Lucifer and the rebel angels' fall from Heaven. Rosa Giorgi discusses these sources in her 2005 book, *Angels and Demons in Art*, when she reports that these Scriptures and Christian ideas discuss that these "fallen" angels willfully turned against God and became evil due to pure wickedness, and they would lead man to sin. Also discussed in Giorgi's book is the Scriptural idea that Lucifer and the fallen angels' rebellion occurred at the time of creation, and when this event occurred the angels split into two opposing sides; with the rebels following Lucifer and the others taking Saint Michael as their leader.¹⁶

If we use the evidence believed by the Scriptures and Christian ideas it can be seen how the idea of Lucifer in Michelangelo's painting is very plausible. These sources also help support my proposed identification of Lucifer as the angel behind Eve. For one thing, these sources "date" the time of the rebellion as occurring during the time of creation. This idea fits perfectly

¹⁶ Rosa Giorgi, *Angels and Demons in Art* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2005) 236.

with this depiction of this scene. This scene is showing the creation of Adam and if we believe what the sources tell us, Lucifer and the rebel angels were around during creation so it is almost certain that these angels were around during the creation of mankind.

John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, published in 1674, also gives an account of the fall, and suggests that it was due to Lucifer's jealousy of man that he was cast out of heaven when he says,

Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt? Th'infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stird up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd The Mother of Mankind, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n with all his Host Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his Peers...¹⁷

It is true that this poem was written in 1674, but it is worth noting because it relies on some of the same sources that both Leo Steinberg and I associate with the fresco.

Plus, Milton's ideas of Lucifer's harboring jealousy for mankind could perfectly explain the scene on the Sistine Chapel ceiling; it is at this moment when Adam is being created by the hand of God that Lucifer's jealousy develops and causes him to rebel and turn wicked. The scene also gives first evidence of Lucifer's role in leading man to sin, because it is he who tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, but perhaps he actually started his plan to destroy mankind even before the temptation in Eden.¹⁸ This theory is represented by Lucifer's placement close to Eve. Lucifer is placed behind the head of Eve in Michelangelo's painting as his eyes are cast downward and stare at her intently with full concentration unaware of the most important event

¹⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 1:33-39.

¹⁸ Genesis 3:1-4.

in the history of the world (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Rome: Sistine Chapel: ceiling frescoes: Creation of Adam (detail), 1508-1512, Sistine Chapel (Vatican Palace, Vatican City) April 12, 2011 art-stor.

He hangs behind her left ear and hovers almost as if about to whisper some secret to her. Perhaps he is already planting the seed of the idea of committing original sin or subliminally telling her to take the forbidden fruit soon to be offered to her from his own hand. It is impossible to know exactly what he is doing, but it is very apparent that this angel is extremely

close to and intent upon Eve which is not an accident on Michelangelo's part and gives stronger evidence to identifying the angel as Lucifer.

Another Christian idea that is present in the *Creation of Adam* is the idea that at the time of the fall some angels followed Lucifer, while the others followed the Archangel Michael. This notion is clearly depicted in the scene because of Michelangelo's placement of the Archangel Michael in the scene. With Michael's presence on the bottom left of the scene in opposition of Lucifer's placement on the upper right, it is a possibility that Michael's followers were the putti on the left while Lucifer's were situated on the right, which refutes Steinberg's theory that Beelzebub is on the bottom left-hand side by God because he was in alliance with Lucifer.¹⁹ I believe that Beelzebub is one of the angels on the right side of the scene, below the figure of Lucifer, as part of Lucifer's army of angels to counter that of Michael's on the left side. The opposition of placement between the two angels and their followers gives great support to the theory of Lucifer being portrayed in the picture, and again, it uses Christian ideals as subject matter for the artwork.

Another place in the same program that these two opposing forces are pictured together is in the *Temptation and Expulsion* (Figure 4). In this scene the devil is pictured as a half-serpent half-human creature wrapped around the tree, and is handing the forbidden fruit to Eve. Also pictured in the next scene over, in the expulsion part of the scene, is the Archangel Michael who is clearly identified by his sword and his action of expelling Adam and Eve from paradise. Like his proposed counterpart in the *Creation of Adam*, Michael is shown with the same blonde color hair, is depicted as flying through the sky, and in an almost perfectly opposing pose to the Devil who is next to him. I believe it is no coincidence that these two figures are pictured together in

¹⁹ Steinberg 560.

the same scene, and are placed back-to-back almost mirroring one another's pose in order to emphasize the complete opposition of good and evil.



Figure 4: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Rome: Sistine Chapel: ceiling frescoes: Temptation and Expulsion, 1508-1512, Sistine Chapel (Vatican Palace, Vatican City) March 16, 2011 artstor.

So, it can be assumed that there cannot be one without the other so, if we are almost certain that the figure with the green fabric is the Archangel Michael; there should, logically, be his opposing force of Evil; Lucifer. And, what better place to put this angel than in opposition of Michael in the *Creation of Adam* so as Michael is pictured on the left side of God, placed below him, the directly opposite position of that would be on the top right side of God, which is precisely where I believe Lucifer to be.

Physical Characteristics

Now let's look more carefully at the figure I have identified as Lucifer. One of the first characteristics that caught my attention and made me connect this figure with Lucifer was his golden hair. Lucifer is called the daystar in the book of *Isaiah 14:3-20*, and Lucifer is a Latin word that literally means light bearer.²⁰ This tradition established an iconographic connection between Lucifer and light, which is reflected in images where Lucifer is depicted with golden blonde hair. Among these images, one of the most striking is the illumination by the Limbourg Brothers entitled the, *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, completed between 1411-1416 from the Book of Hours of the Duc de Berry (Figure 5).

²⁰ Isaiah 14:3-20



Figure 5: Limbourg Brothers, *Tres Riches Heures de Duc de Berry*: ms. 65 fol. 64v: Penitential Psalms: Fall of the rebel angels: det., c.1411-1416, Books of Hours. December 17, 2009 [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/Folio_64v - The Fall of the Rebel Angels.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/Folio_64v_-_The_Fall_of_the_Rebel_Angels.jpg).

Another characteristic that this figure has in common with Lucifer is his beautiful face. The reason that Steinberg identified his angel as Lucifer is because he said he had a, “cheerless face” and his stance is described as, “The posture is graceless, unbecoming of an angel.”²¹ However, Steinberg seems to have overlooked the passage in Isaiah that describes Lucifer as

²¹ Steingberg 560.

“exceedingly handsome” as described by Giorgi.²² The angel that Steinberg selected does not fit this description, however, the angel to the right of Eve certainly does. It is true that most depictions of Lucifer and the Devil are mostly grotesque, but Michelangelo does not depict the Devil as a grotesque figure.

In the scene of the *Temptation and Expulsion* on the Sistine ceiling, Michelangelo depicts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Figure 4). Eve is lounging on a rock and is in the process of receiving the forbidden fruit from the devil, whose serpent-like bottom-half human upper-half wraps itself around a tree. This creature is Michelangelo’s depiction of the Devil, but is not grotesque in any way. In fact this figure of the Devil has the same golden color hair as Lucifer in the *Creation of Adam*, he is in interaction with Eve; almost in the same position as before, and is a beautiful looking creature. So, it is not plausible that Michelangelo would have depicted Lucifer as an unattractive angel when he depicted the Devil in a beautiful way. If anything the Devil should have been the less attractive figure, and the shared attributes between the figures in both of the scenes also supports the theory of the beautiful Lucifer in the *Creation of Adam*.

The idea of the Devil being depicted as a beautiful creature was not an unknown image to Michelangelo. In the Brancacci Chapel in Florence Masolino da Panicale painted a very similar depiction of the devil in his rendition the temptation scene titled, *Original Sin*, in 1427 (Figure 6).

²² Giorgi 244.



Figure 6: Masolino da Panicale, Original Sin, 1427, Brancacci Chapel, Florence Italy, April 12, 2011, artstor.

Again, as in Michelangelo's *Temptation and Expulsion*, pictured are Adam and Eve with a tree, and wrapped around the tree is the Devil with a beautiful human head on top of a serpent body. The head is lovely and fair and also has the blonde colored hair like Michelangelo's Devil and Lucifer.

Also in the Brancacci Chapel is another very familiar scene that marks an eerie resemblance to one of Michelangelo's. On the wall opposite Masolino's piece is its pendant, Masaccio's *Expulsion from Paradise*, which was completed between 1424-1427 (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Masaccio, Expulsion, 1424-1427, Brancacci Chapel, Florence Italy, April 12, 2011, artstor.

Pictured in this scene are Adam and Eve at the moment they are being expelled from the Garden of Eden forever. Adam hides his face within his hands while Eve seems to be in utter hysteria as she covers herself. Also, making an appearance in this scene is our good friend the

Archangel Michael. He is, again, shown flying in, sword in hand about to throw the two sinners out of paradise forever. These figures look so similar to Michelangelo's scene of *Temptation and Expulsion* that it seems certain that Michelangelo was influenced by them.

It appears as if Michelangelo saw these images and decided to marry them together into one overall scene in his program on the ceiling. Michelangelo lived in Florence at the time these images were produced so the probability of him combining the images together in his artwork would have been very high. He would have definitely known and seen these images, so the portrayals of a beautiful Devil and the Archangel Michael's presence in the expulsion are nothing new to him. These two Brancacci Chapel scenes may have been the inspiration to his Devil and Michael, and acted as a tool for him to show the linkage between Lucifer and the Devil.

Michelangelo's Knowledge of Lucifer

As discussed previously, Michelangelo was aware of Devil imagery and it is important to explore the amount of information he may have known on this topic. According to John Addington Symond's research on the Buonarroti family conducted in 1911, Michelangelo was deeply religious, knew Biblical passages very well, and felt very strongly about religious symbolism.²³ In order for Michelangelo to have known about Lucifer he would have had to have read *Isaiah's 14:3-20* which explains about Lucifer and his "fall".²⁴ It is certainly plausible that Michelangelo as well as key figures in his audience had knowledge and familiarity of this passage, and the relevant visual tradition of the fall. Michelangelo should have also been aware of the fall because according to Vasari, Pope Clement wanted him to paint a scene of the fall in

²³ John Addington Symonds, The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti: Based on Studies in the Archives of the Buonarroti Family at Florence (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1911) 242.

²⁴ Isaiah 14:3-20.

opposition to the *Last Judgment* wall fresco. Vasari says, “and on the opposite wall over the main door he ordered Michelangelo to paint the moment when Lucifer was driven out of Heaven because of his pride and cast down to the centre of Hell along with all those angels who sinned with him.”²⁵ However, that proposal happened after the Sistine ceiling was finished, so could Michelangelo have been aware and used this subject in his *Creation of Adam*?

It is very probable but there is not much art prior to the *Creation of Adam* that explores the subject matter of Lucifer before and during his fall. However, in Luther Link’s book, *The Devil: The Archfiend in Art from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Century*, in 1996 claims that one of the earliest known “falls” in Renaissance art by the Limbourg Brothers and their *Fall of the Rebel Angels* manuscript page in the Book of Hours (Figure 5). According to Luther Link this illumination is a rare exception to typical portrayals of Lucifer during his fall. He calls this depiction of Lucifer a “Beautiful” one because Lucifer is not depicted in his usual grotesque manner, but he looks noble and lovely.²⁶

On this manuscript page is a depiction of Lucifer falling from heaven in the upside-down position towards the bottom of the page. He is engulfed in golden flames as he falls towards his fiery fate. He is flanked on both sides by his fellow fallen angels, who tumble from heaven in a collection of diverse poses that form a distinct “V” on the page. This “V” allows your eyes to smoothly transition downwards from the other angels towards Lucifer. He and his angels have golden hair and wings and are in rich blue robes. Lucifer is adorned with a golden sash around his neck that has red crosses on it and his hands are raised above his head, his head is crowned with a coronet, and his face has an expression of sorrow and fear as he plummets to his doom.

²⁵ Vasari, 458.

²⁶ Luther Link, *The Devil: the Archfiend in Art from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Century* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1996) 26.

There is no evidence that Michelangelo ever saw this manuscript. Even if he did not know it directly it provides an early example of the subject matter of the “beautiful” Lucifer. Michelangelo was probably not directly aware of this image, but he may have seen similar figures of the “beautiful Lucifer,” since, as Rosa Giorgi has argued, they had begun to appear in European art as early as the ninth century.²⁷ Closer to home, Michelangelo’s contemporary Northern Italian painter, Marco Da Oggiono, also painted this similar subject matter on a panel in the church of Santa Maria della Pace in Milan, *Three Archangels Defeating Lucifer*, finished in 1516 which now resides in the Pinacoteca di Brera (Figure 9).

²⁷ Giorgi 236.



Figure 8: Marco Da Oggiono, Three Archangels Defeating Lucifer, c.1517, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Italy. December 17, 2009
<http://www.artres.com/c/htm/CSearchZ.aspx?o=&Total=10&FP=11087000&E=22SIJMBJF26WG&SID=JMGEJNDL5EW08&Pic=10&SubE=2UNTWAWKUKUK>.

In this painting, three angels surround the construed figure of Lucifer as he falls into a pit. The angels are dressed in voluminous, brightly colored clothing and all have very angelic looking faces that are similar in style to the faces painted by Oggiono's role model, Leonardo da Vinci. Lucifer is portrayed in the more usual, monstrous way; he is naked, has black wings and hair, and clawed feet. His face is twisted and angry looking as he falls into the dark depths of what we can assume is hell. The angel on the left is pointing upwards to the main Archangel in the middle. This Archangel is holding a sword and his looking ready to strike down Lucifer and, we can presume that this is the Archangel Michael because of his sword and iconic pose.

There is no evidence that either of these men knew of each other or the other's work, but the fact that they both used Lucifer and the Archangel Michael together allows us to believe that each character was important to the other and it supports my proposal that Lucifer is also in the *Creation of Adam*. These works give evidence that Michelangelo knew about Lucifer and his fall, and could have known, seen, and used some part of them in his *Creation of Adam*.

Lucifer and the Archangel Michael

The representation of Lucifer as the Devil and Michael together is a familiar one, exemplified in a couple pieces by others who composed artwork around the same time as Michelangelo's fresco ceiling. One, Raphael's *Saint Michael and the Dragon* (Figure 10), which was originally painted for the palace of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, and now hangs in the Louvre. It was completed prior to the execution of Michelangelo's ceiling, in 1505.²⁸

²⁸ Julia Cartwright Ady, Early Work of Raphael (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1907) 16.



Figure 9: Raphael, Saint Michael and the Dragon, 1505, Paris, Musée du Louvre. March 16, 2011 artstor.

The other, Lorenzo Lotto's *Saint Michael Drives out Lucifer* (Figure 10), came some decades after the ceiling's completion, in 1550. Lotto painted this while residing in Loreto, and it now resides there in the Museo della Santa Casa del Palazzo Apostolico.²⁹

²⁹ Lotto, http://www.lorenzolotto.info/nqcontent.cfm?a_name=loreto&lang=en# (April 2011).



Figure 10: Lorenzo Lotto, Saint Michael Drives out Lucifer, 1550, Loreto, Museo della Santa Casa del Palazzo Apostolico. March 16, 2011 <http://www.artliste.com/archange-saint-michel-chassant-lucifer-lorenzo-lotto-13-388-iphone.jpg>.

It is not known if Michelangelo saw Raphael's painting or if Lorenzo Lotto was influenced by Michelangelo's ceiling, but there are characteristics in both compositions that are worth pointing out in relation to Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.

In Raphael's *Saint Michael and the Dragon* the Archangel Michael is in the process of striking down the devil, which is pictured as a dragon. All around him are grotesque figures meant to represent evil, and in the background there lies a castle as well as other creatures and human beings being attacked on the back right side. Saint Michael is in the foreground dressed in ancient Roman armor. He holds a sword in his right hand, which is raised in the air above his head of curly blonde locks about ready to strike the creature being crushed under his left foot. In his left arm he yields a white sword with a red cross on it. He stands on his left foot with his right leg suspended in the air behind him. His clothing gives the sense of movement as if he had just flown here to smite evil to the ground.

This idea of the "flying" Michael shares a common place between the two artists. In their depictions of Michael he is shown as being in movement or having just been flying from elsewhere. In Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, Michael is depicted under God's leg and seems to be propelling the cloak upward with his green piece of fabric flapping in the wind, and in the *Expulsion* scene the Archangel Michael is, again, shown as flying in from some other place ready to expel Adam and Eve from Eden forever. Again, as mentioned before, in Raphael's piece he too has movement in his clothing to indicate his "flying" about.

Even though Michelangelo's Archangel is painted as "flying", it is important to note the oddity of this considering the angel does not have any wings. His portrayal of Michael breaks all traditional depictions of the Archangel because of his choice to not include wings, and this may make one think that because Michelangelo made the decision to not paint in wings that he was

not influenced by any other artwork. However, Michelangelo was an innovator. What he did best was to take already established artistic traditions and turn them on their heads. It was commonplace for him to take a standard piece of artwork such as the well-known imagery of the Archangel Michael and put a “spin” on it. Thus, he created a flying angel, Michael, without any wings acting as a creator himself while ironically painting God, the ultimate artist, creating his masterpiece of Adam.

Another characteristic that these angels share is a head full of blonde curls. Both Raphael and Michelangelo’s Saint Michael contain this wild, voluminous head of hair, which seems to be a very distinctive characteristic of Michael since so many illustrations of him contain this feature including Raphael’s and Marco Da Oggiono’s works (Figures 8 & 9). The one last most important characteristic that links Michelangelo to Raphael’s painting and gives evidence to his knowledge and probable usage of Lucifer in his *Creation of Adam* is the sheer fact that Saint Michael and Lucifer are pictured together so often in artwork. It can be seen here that contemporaries of Michelangelo’s decided to portray the two characters together, so it is not a farfetched idea that Michelangelo would use this standard combination as a means to identify. Because of the popularity of this subject matter it is difficult to comprehend one angel without the other, and since we are quite certain that Michael is shown in the *Creation of Adam* shouldn’t his arch nemesis, Lucifer, be present as well?

As previously noted, the subject matter of Saint Michael and Lucifer is a very standard theme throughout art. Another artist contemporary of Michelangelo’s time, Lorenzo Lotto, also used this well-known scene for his work entitled *Saint Michael Drives Out Lucifer* (Figure 9). He created this piece of work after Michelangelo had completed work on the Sistine Chapel, which suggests that he could have been influenced by Michelangelo. According to an article

published this year in the New York Times by Roderick Morris, the architect Bramante spotted some of Lotto's work and invited him to Rome, which Lotto gladly accepted. He was then commissioned in 1509 for decorations in the Papal palace, but due to the rise and popularity of Raphael there was little work to be done so he returned to Marche in 1511.³⁰ It is not known for sure whether or not Lorenzo Lotto saw Michelangelo's work during this time, but it seems very probable that he had. Lotto may have followed Michelangelo's suit and went with a change from the standard grotesque depiction of Lucifer to a "beautiful" one.

Raphael depicted Lucifer or the Devil as a dragon, but Lorenzo shows him as an angel with human characteristics. In his piece (Figure 10) the Archangel Michael is once again shown in his iconographic pose, painted as flying through the air in the same position as Raphael's; right arm raised above the head ready to strike, left leg in front, and right leg extended in the air behind. Both artists depicted Michael in reference to ancient Roman regalia and armor, and Lorenzo is sure to include the iconographical head of curly hair. However, the Lucifer in Lorenzo Lotto's piece resembles the one in the Lucifer in the Limbourg Brother's earlier rendition of the *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (Figure 5). Lucifer is depicted as a beautiful angel once again falling backwards into the dark depths of hell as he holds up his hands in defense to the attack of Michael.

This change in Lucifer's depiction from Raphael to Lorenzo Lotto's can give great evidence to Michelangelo's usage Lucifer in his painting. It is important to note that Raphael's painting was finished before Michelangelo was working on the *Creation of Adam*, and potentially could have been a huge influence on Michelangelo's artwork including the reason why Lucifer may be in his work. However, Raphael's Lucifer or Devil do not match that of

³⁰ Roderick Conway Morris, "Lorenzo Lotto, Renaissance Master, Gets His Due," New York Times Online 12 Apr. 2011, 12 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/13/arts/13iht-conway13.html>>.

Michelangelo's so it is difficult to completely connect the two artists' works together entirely, but Michelangelo was known as an innovator of his time, and was not afraid to take artistic liberties which could be an explanation for the different depictions of Lucifer.

However, the more important painting to note is that of Lorenzo Lotto's because his subject matter carries from Raphael and perhaps through Michelangelo. Lotto's piece was created after Michelangelo had ended work on the Sistine ceiling, and it is important to note this because Lorenzo and Michelangelo's Lucifers are very similar. So since there is a thread of similar subject matter running between Raphael and Lorenzo Lotto's subject matter it can be assumed that the "thread" linking them together could quite possibly be Michelangelo. Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* could possibly contain the subject of the Archangel Michael and Lucifer such as in Raphael's piece, but also contains the beautiful Lucifer before and during the fall, which Lorenzo Lotto depicts with his rendition of Lucifer's fall. This, however, is all speculation, but there is a definite possibility of a connection between all three of these contemporary artists.

To further support these speculations it is important note the main theme illustrated through all three of the artists' works; the opposition between good and evil portrayed through Lucifer and the Archangel Michael. In Lorenzo Lotto's artwork (Figure 10) the pose Lucifer is painted in is almost the exact mirror image of Michael's. Both angels have their left arm outstretched towards each other with the right arm pulled back by the head. They both have the same positioning of the legs; one leg is extended forward while the other juts out behind the body. Rosa Giorgi goes even further as to speculating that Lucifer is representing Michael's alternate self when she says, "His face resembles Michael's, as is Lucifer were Michael's

opposite (dark) side.”³¹ Giorgi brings up a very good point about the opposition of good and evil because each of these characters represents either good or evil, and this is the main theme of Archangel Michael and Lucifer’s struggle. So, again, since we can speculate that the “flying” angel in the *Creation of Adam* is Michael there must always be an opposition to the “good” side, so in placement opposition to Michael is where we can find Lucifer.

³¹ Giorgi 249.

Chapter 5

Deeper Meaning of the Scene

Now, that we have discovered some good evidence to support Lucifer's alleged presence in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* it is time to dive even deeper into the scene and try and uncover a much more intricate meaning behind it. Michelangelo purposefully selected and used specific characters in the scene, which add a layer of narrative and theological depth to the meaning of the scene. Also, through reading visual clues about the placement of these characters within the composition we, the viewer, may be able to decipher exactly what is going on in the scene. It is also very important to keep in mind Michelangelo's roots in traditional images, which in most cases propelled him to create new and innovative pieces that allowed him to be such a tremendous artist throughout time.

I believe that Michelangelo used the *Creation of Adam* scene to indicate a foretelling of the rise, fall, and redemption of mankind. Michelangelo skillfully depicted the events by way of characters and their placement in the one scene, and amazingly was able to show the entire chain of events of the life of man starting with the creation of Adam. After Adam's creation Eve was born and once Adam and Eve were created Lucifer became jealous, and thus the creation of Adam caused his fall and his expulsion by his arch nemesis Michael. Lucifer fell to Hell where he devised a plan in order to gain revenge by tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden. Thus, Eve ate the forbidden fruit from the Devil, which caused her and Adam's expulsion, and ultimately the fall of mankind. They too were thrown out by the Archangel Michael. Then, because of the fall of mankind God created Christ, the redeemer, in order to save us all. This entire chain of events is cleverly placed in the *Creation of Adam*, but it is hard to identify unless you know what you are looking for.

Selection and Placement of Characters

The most important pieces of evidence that we have that help us understand this detailed foretelling are Michelangelo's choice of characters and their placements within the scene. It is because of this cast of character that one is able to read the previously mentioned chain of events, and Michelangelo was counting on the viewer's knowledge of biblical history and visual traditions to aid in the comprehension of this scene. He purposefully selected each of the main characters in the scene for specific reasons, and each is imperative to the shaping of mankind because they contribute some type of action or reaction to a certain event.

First, he selected Adam who the scene is not only about, but also acts as the first event in the history of mankind. With his creation being shown he is the first link in the chain, and due to the event of his birth a reaction occurred. Adam is placed on the very left side of the scene which is very fitting considering he is the start of the chain of events. When reading a book one will always start at the very left hand side of the page, so what better place for Adam to be than there?

Then we follow God's right arm all the way over to his left where we find Eve and Lucifer. Using God's arm as our guide, we note that Eve is the next figure we reach. Her presence here is representing her creation as a reaction to Adam's creation and thus identifies the next event. Eve is also paired with Lucifer who sits behind her head allegedly whispering subliminal messages into her ear almost as to prepare her for her upcoming temptation.

Lucifer's presence behind the head of Eve also depicts the next event in the chain; the "fall of the rebel angels". It is due to the creation of man that Lucifer and his followers fall because of their jealousy towards mankind. So, due to his close proximity to Eve we can

interpret his placement as a representation of the next event in the scene; his fall which was ultimately caused by the creation of man.

Now, Michael's presence in the scene is also very important. He has the imperative job of casting evil out of Heaven. However, because of his placement at the bottom left part of the cloak it may seem like he has nothing to do with the chain of events, but actually he does.

Michael is not following the same path as the other characters because he is neither part of an action or reaction to an event; he is just there to assist just as he is assisting God by carrying him through the air. But that does not mean he is an unimportant figure, on the contrary, due to this out of path placement there is more emphasis placed upon his job of kicking people out of heaven. He is placed in direct opposition to Lucifer because Michael is the one who expels him from Heaven, but we must also note his opposition to Eve. Eve is in front of Lucifer and, too, in opposition to Michael. And, it was Eve's disobedience to God which got her and Adam kicked out of Eden, and who was it that Michelangelo painted that expelled Adam and Eve? Michael.

With all this discussion of Eve it is important to note her next important event. When Lucifer fell to Hell he decided to gain revenge by tempting Eve with the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The placement of Eve and Lucifer together as a pair shows their action and reaction to each other; with her and Adam's creation Lucifer fell, and with his fall and tempting she and Adam fell. So, being together really shows how each influenced the other and due to each of their actions another event occurred.

If we continue to follow God's arms we come to the last and final event in this Biblical chain of events. At the very fingertip of God we find the Christ Child who was created in order to save Man. His creation was an effect due to the fall of man, which was represented by Eve, and Lucifer's pairing. So, once we reach the end of God's arms we find the child who would be

the redeemer for all mankind, and thus completing the cycle of the rise, fall, and redemption of mankind.

I think it is also important to note how Michelangelo cleverly led us through these events by way of God's arms. In a sense it was as if he was sending a message that in order to understand difficult things we must follow the "way" of God because he will lead us through life. I think it is very fitting that Michelangelo chose God's loving arms as a means of subtly showing us our history, and to ultimately bring to our attention the importance of following the way of God.

The choice of characters and their locations played a key role in understanding the meaning behind this scene. Michelangelo relied upon the viewer's knowledge of Biblical characters to assist in the understanding of the entire meaning of the scene. He also relied upon artistic traditions of visual clues such as the placement of characters beside one another. In order for a person to understand the chain of events dispersed throughout the scene he must be able to identify characters and understand their meaning in context with other important characters of the scene.

Why Michelangelo Created this Scene

There is no identifiable reason as to why Michelangelo would have painted the most important events in Biblical history all into one scene. There are no accounts of his thoughts and ideas on this matter. It is a very intricate idea to perceive, however, I believe Michelangelo wanted to create a much "higher" piece of intellectual art. He was one of the most recognizable innovators of art, and his creations were original, intricate, and expertly executed. I think that the *Creation of Adam* is no different from any other innovative artwork he created at the time.

Michelangelo knew artistic visual traditions extremely well, and used them as a basis to his creations. However, because he was such an amazing artist he created artwork that fused both new and old ideas together, and it was because of that he was the most well-known artist of his time and of today. The *Creation of Adam* is no exception to this and actually exemplifies this idea perfectly. He took artistic traditions such as depicting Lucifer and the Archangel Michael together, and fused them with new ideas of his own such as not giving Michael any wings and placing both characters into a scene which is not a normal setting for them to be in.

Michelangelo decided to create this scene in order to show his excellent skills as an artist, to show the high erudition of the artist, and ultimately how the artist, like God, can be a creator. He wanted to show the artist's God-like quality of having the ability to create. Michelangelo understood traditions and knew every artistic technique in the book, but he wanted to show the world the power that the artist had; creation. So, Michelangelo intelligently painted this idea subtly through the assumed knowledge of mankind's chain of events and through the depiction of God. He was showing the artists association with Him and literally through the scene; the *Creation of Adam*.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

There is very little evidence known about Michelangelo's knowledge of Lucifer and his fall, and it is difficult to speculate exactly what he had in mind for the scene. However, through many different pieces of evidence of his and other contemporaries' work we are able to strongly hypothesize that Lucifer was part of the scene. Also, through his usage of characters and their placements within the scene Michelangelo is able to show an important chain of events in biblical history. All because of the creation of man many events occurred like the rebellion and fall of Lucifer because of Michael, Eve's creation and temptation, the fall of man, and the creation of Christ to redeem mankind. Lucifer's presence in the *Creation of Adam* is imperative to Michelangelo's overall vision, and to identify him we must look closely because the Devil is in the details of this painting.

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