

**Poem to John Tietjen
On the 20th Anniversary of his Ordination**

Robert W. Bertram

Michaelmas, 1973

Revelation 12:7-12

“For even in the face of death
they would not cling to life”—
these dragon-fighting angels,
this bloodied brotherhood
of Michael’s men.

For men they were, though angels too,
yet not the sort of angels who
already gathered round the throne
and faced-to-face with deity.

These not yet gloried angels are
those sinners who both day and night
have stood accused before their God,
subjected to deceit and death
and still, alas, engaged in war
--a war, admittedly, that’s waged in heaven,
though not in heaven above, beyond the fray,
but rather in that heavenly realm
which, as He said, is in your midst.

For notice how mundane,
how down to earth,
these angels’ weapons are:
the blood of a Lamb
and their own stammering
martyrdoms.

Yet notice, on the other hand,
who Michael is,
whose men they are.
He too is not some ghastly form
some disincarnate blur,
but is, as Daniel saw,
that *Micha-el*,
Quis-sicut-Deus,

“Who-is-like-God,”
who imaged forth the Father
in His own red blood and martyrdom
right here where the primeval serpent holds
the brotherhood in jeopardy.

Thus Michael won authority
for us unlikely angels too
to sing our battle-dusty voices hoarse
with such big-talk as

“Victory
and power
and empire
to our God.”

What dragon-baiting brass we’ve got,
What chutzpah for such shy schlemitzls,
What winners all we losers are.

So happy Michaelmas, good John,
who’ve taught us as few angels have
The Secret of this Michael’s men.
For even in the face of death
you would not cling to life
but unto Him
whose life you’ve drawn
and shared with us,
the bloodied brotherhood.

(Based on the text of the Jerusalem Bible, with exegetical help from Martin Luther.)