

The Catholic Doctrine of the Devil

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In the Catholic Church, the existence of the devil has always been a believed truth, never even put into question. Its doctrine can be found in the treatise "De Angelis" concerning the reason why the Devil is a fallen angel.

In Revelation, Ch. 12, John tells of the struggle between the Angels who were with God, led by Michael, and the evil angels led by the Dragon. Michael won and the Dragon with its angels were thrown out of Heaven.

Following a tradition common to Hebrews, Christians and Mohammedans, the angels could have rebelled to support the rights of spiritual beings" when they understood the glory which man would have reached, being created by God to reflect His image and nature. The rebellion of Angels is a kind of original sin of angels. But for them it is impossible to have salvation and repentance, because they acted in full freedom without being tempted, while man sinned under Satan's temptation.

The theological doctrine about devils is supported more by tradition than the Bible. The first dogmatic declaration to this purpose was made in 1215 during the Fourth Ecumenical Lateran council. In this occasion too, the existence of Devils is supposed.

The Church states that devils are created beings and that they are not eternal like God (this against the Albigensian heresy): "We declare that the Devil and all other demons have been created good by God, they became evil for their fault and man has sinned for their fault." The theology on demons is based on the above statement.

During the Middle ages the Scholastics sought to explain logically this problem of faith. They felt the need for a hierarchy, following the principles of astronomy at that time. The starting point was man; from him towards God they put a complete hierarchy of good spirits; on the other side, starting from man, there was a hierarchy of evil spirits up to Lucifer.

Pope Pius XII, in 1950 discussed the theological side concerning demons. In the encyclical "Humani Generis", the pope gave clear statements against those who were questioning the personal existence of Angels and Demons.

In the most advanced currents of modern theology, we see a renewal regarding the doctrine of demons and angels. It is believed that the Biblical expression concerning these beings are only literary forms, pertaining to the figurative speech of the time, so as to express God's actions. Consequently, the existence of these spirits is doubted.

This opinion has been embraced by the "Dutch Catechism."

Up to now, the church has not said anything against this: we have heard only some critiques and requests of explanations. One of these critiques concerns just the existence of the Devil. But during the discussions raised by the Dutch Catechism, Pope Paul VI has publicly pronounced a profession of faith and he has clearly made a reference to the existence of angels and demons.