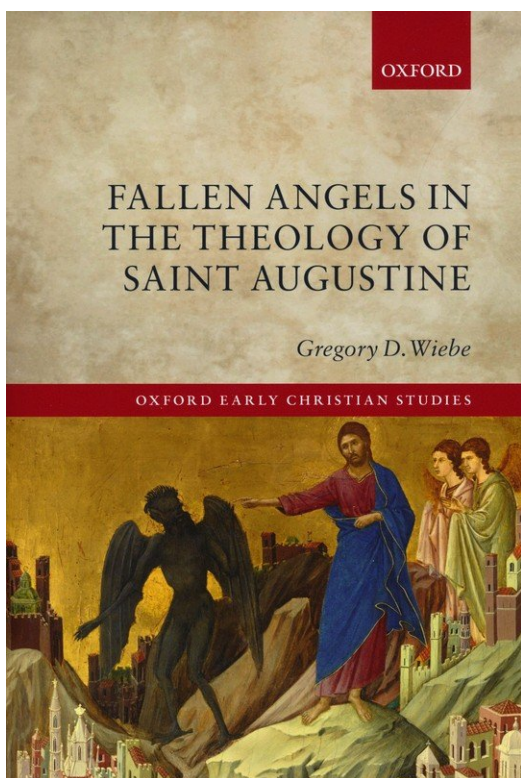


**Gregory D. Wiebe, *Fallen Angels in the Theology of St Augustine*.  
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*Reviewed by  
the Rev S C Sharman, PhD*

Gregory D. Wiebe, PhD, has given us an excellent study of the role of angels and especially fallen angels in the theology of St Augustine of Hippo. This is a very scholarly book written by an academic for academics. It is after all a revision of the dissertation which he wrote to earn his Doctorate of Philosophy. Specialists in the study of St Augustine's theology will find this a very rewarding book; it is full of the results of careful research and reflection. General readers, however, will need some knowledge of theology and history in order to follow his argument. Some knowledge of the neo-Platonism of Plotinus, Porphyry and their disciples will be useful to understand Dr. Wiebe's book. Wiebe bases his argument upon a careful study of many of St Augustine's books, in particular *City of God*, *the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, *Demonic Divination*, *Teaching Christianity* and others.

This is a volume about God and the love and service of God. Angles love and serve God and remain in His kingdom. By contrast, the fallen angels have refused to love and to serve God and thereby have betrayed the logic of their creation. They have turned away from God. Their pride and self-love lead them astray and then they lead mankind astray. In their turn, mankind's pride and

self-love encourage them to abandon the love and service of God for that of the devil and his demons.

Wiebe's book proceeds logically from chapter to chapter. His chapter headings trace his progress: 1. "The Angels of God" (pp 16-52), 2. "The Fall of the Angels" (pp 53-93), 3. "Demonic Bodies" (pp 94-119), 4. "Demonic Phenomena" (pp 120-146), 5. "The Devil and His Body" (pp 147-177), and 6. "Pagan Demonolatry" (pp 178-221). He begins with God and the creation of angels on the first day of creation according to the account of creation in the Book of Genesis. Angels are created as beings of light. Then Wiebe explores the fall of the angels. They were free to serve and love God; some do and some choose to withdraw their love and service. They choose themselves rather than God. They become demons. Wiebe proceeds to analyse the composition of the demons' bodies and their ways of tempting mankind. An important part of this is the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This temptation led to the fall of man. The demons' temptations of mankind continue into the present. Wiebe talks about the devil's body which is the community of angles and men who choose to follow the devil rather than God. He concludes with a critique of St Augustine's views of the Roman Empire and its state religion. We remember that St Augustine's book, *The City of God*, was written in response to the fall of Rome to Alaric and the Goths. In St Augustine's opinion the pagan gods of Rome were demons and the people who followed them were engaged in demon worship. Wiebe's book has therefore a logical structure and is well and elegantly argued.

There are a goodly number of interesting passages in this book. We shall examine two of them to provide a taste of the whole book.

An interesting step in the argument is Wiebe's discussion of St Augustine's conviction that angels were created in the first day of creation when light was created. ("The Creation of the Angels," pp 23-25, and also pp 33-5 and 74-7). The Biblical account of the first day of creation reads: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the Evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1: 3-5 AV). Wiebe comments: "The Lord said 'Let light be made,' and the angels were made, enlightened by the Wisdom of God, partakers in eternal

light” (p 23). This conviction answers the lack of any explicit account of the creation of angels in the Biblical account. Further Wiebe argues: “Rather, this first-created light is much better understood as the light of which the sun itself is only an image, the light of understanding, the enlightenment spiritual or intellectual creatures find in the Word” and buttresses his opinion with a quotation from *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (p 24). This reviewer would like to know more about the provenience of this idea. Wiebe explores the timing of the fall of the angels and concludes that it took place soon after their creation.

Another interesting and valuable part of the book is Wiebe’s careful study of St Augustine’s explanation of the limitations of the demons’ power. Demons often appear to be accurate prophets of the future. St Augustine, however, has a rational explanation which does not give them the power of prophesy (pp 103 & 139-41). Wiebe quotes Gregory A. Smith: “In Smith’s apt description, they see a distant event, set off running, and scoop ordinary news channels” (p 103). Demons are also limited in their activities since they require God’s permission in order to act: “demons, like all things, must abide by God’s permission” (p 138). The ultimate authority belongs to God.

These are but two of the many places on his book where Wiebe offers useful insights about St Augustine’s thoughts about the fallen angels or demons. These places add to the joy of reading his book. Wiebe makes a valuable contribution to the study of the theology of St Augustine of Hippo.

Wiebe has supplied his book with useful foot notes, bibliographies and indices. This reviewer suggests that a glossary of technical theological terms would have been valuable. Reading this book has encouraged this reviewer to embark upon a rereading of *The City of God*.

*About the reviewer:* Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.