Title: Illustration 11 to Milton's "Paradise Lost": Michael Foretells the Crucifixion
Date: 1807
Primary Maker: William Blake
Medium: pen and watercolor

Description: In his lengthy description of mankind's future, the warrior angel Michael tells of Christ's crucifixion (12:401-35). Michael, wearing a "Helm" like a centurion's and holding his "Spear" (11:245, 249), points and looks toward Christ "nai'd to the Cross" (12:413) below the traditional Latin motto INRI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews). Christ's lineaments, loin cloth, and crown of thorns are very similar to those in Blake's watercolor of ca. 1800-1803, "Christ Crucified between the Two Thieves" (Fogg Museum; Butlin 1981, No. 494). Adam, no longer wearing leaves around his loins, holds his hands in prayer and gazes up at Christ's face. The cross is raised on a small hill, as is conventional for representations of Calvary. The landscape also accords with the "Hill/ Of Paradise" (11:377-78) from which Michael shows Adam this vision of the future. At the foot of the cross are Sin and Death, for Christ's sacrifice has defeated them (see 12:415-17, 431). [1] Sin's hellhounds, three of whose heads lie on her torso, have also been stilled forever. The upside-down cruciform posture of Sin and Death, foreshadowed by the bearded devil in the first design, indicates that they are "with him [Christ] there crucifi'd" (12:417). The serpent coils just above the fallen pair, his head pierced by the nail through Christ's feet. This early Christian motif is suggested by Michael's prophecy that the crucifixion "Shall bruise the head of Satan" (12:430). Blake also used this symbol in "The Everlasting Gospel" of ca. 1818: "And thus with wrath he did subdue/ The Serpent Bulk of Natures dross/ Till he had nai'd it to the Cross." [2] Just as Adam slept while Eve "to life was form'd" (11:369), she now sleeps "below while thou [Adam] to foresight wak'st" (11:368). She lies in a shallow depression in the ground which suggests burial, or close identification with the earth, as much as sleep. Blake may have used this odd motif to suggest his own ideas about the annihilation of a separate female will, or emanation, necessary for spiritual renewal. In the Butts/Boston version, Michael is larger in proportion to the other figures and his left arm is more bent at the elbow. His right arm descends down the shaft of his spear. Adam, Eve, and Michael are closer to the cross. The Latin motto does not appear at the top of the cross. Christ's crown of thorns is more prominent. As in plate 76 of Jerusalem (ca. 1804-20), His loin cloth is knotted in front and its loose end hangs between His thighs. Only the serpent's head, rather than his head and a loop of his body, is pierced by the nail. His head is now crowned with a comb as in both versions of the ninth illustration. A spiral form, not colored like the rest of his body, replaces the serpent's coils heaped above Sin in the Huntington version. The depression in which Eve lies is accentuated by its brown coloring which contrasts with the surrounding yellow-green hillside. There are more individually outlined tufts of vegetation than in
Dimensions: 9 15/16 x 8 in. (25.2 x 20.3 cm.)