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A STUDY OF
FRA ANGELICO AND MICHELANGELO
AS INTERPRETERS OF RELIGION
THROUGH THEIR PAINTINGS

By

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A Thesis

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To my teacher and friend,
Mrs. Louise Meyer Wood,
this thesis is lovingly dedicated.

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INTRODUCTION

A STUDY OF
FRA ANGELICO AND MICHELANGELO
AS INTERPRETERS OF RELIGION
THROUGH THEIR PAINTINGS

INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem of the Thesis Stated

To a greater or less extent, art has given expression to the Christian faith throughout the history of the Christian Church. Especially was this true as Christian art first arose in the catacombs, for here its function was more basic than merely appealing to the senses. Its task was to strengthen the faith of those who must meet death. Preceding the Reformation, the patron of art was the Church. Art became the Bible for men and women who were largely illiterate and without books. A man could take his friend to the cathedral and through paintings, sculpture, and architecture point out to him the message of his Christ.

The problem of this thesis finds its setting in this time when art was relied upon heavily for religious fortitude and inspiration. The purpose of this thesis is to discover characteristics of interpretation of religion found in the paintings of Fra Angelico and Michelangelo, two artists who perhaps did more to bring God into the lives of men and women through their art than any other painters of their

age. In order to highlight these qualities, study will be made also of the life and times of each artist.

B. The Significance of the Problem

There are many mediums which may be utilized in order to give expression to religious truth. However, each medium has its own peculiar characteristics which cannot be duplicated in another medium. Even with only a superficial knowledge of religious art, there is an acquaintance with Fra Angelico's and Michelangelo's paintings, but their paintings speak more powerfully as a greater awareness of their peculiar characteristics are recognized and the times and life of the artists are considered.

C. The Problem Delimited

A study will be made of all the available paintings of both artists, but only a selected number will be presented as representative of their artistic work of each period.

D. The Method of Procedure

The procedure of this thesis is indicative in that it begins with what the eye sees, the paintings themselves. After a brief study of the selected paintings, the distinctive characteristics of these paintings will be noted in relation to religious values. A further study will be made of the artistic, philosophic and religious trends which characterize the respective periods in which they lived as

well as a study of their lives.

E. Sources of Data

Since very few originals are available in this country, the very best reproductions of the paintings of Fra Angelico and Michelangelo will be secured for study. One hundred and fifty personal letters written by Michelangelo are available. Further information regarding his life is given by his contemporary, Vasari. Material regarding Fra Angelico is not as plentiful, but Vasari and Condivi both give information regarding his life and conduct. The writings of leading critics on these two artists will be considered also.

CHAPTER I

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS
IN THE PAINTINGS OF FRA ANGELICO AS
INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGION

CHAPTER I

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE PAINTINGS OF FRA ANGELICO AS INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGION

A. Introduction

In any collection of religious paintings there usually is a painting of Fra Angelico's. When his artistic works are placed amongst other religious art, one immediately senses something distinctive about them. The well known critic, Langton Douglas, became very conscious of this distinctive element and concludes his study of Fra Angelico's paintings with these lines:

"In contemplating his pictures we become filled with a sense of the glory and beauty of a universe in which God is ever immanent. The artist woos us away from our sorrows, from our consciousness of the world's pain, and makes us look out upon life with his eyes. We believe for a moment that the maladies of humanity are remediable, that they are being remedied, that they are themselves but necessary episodes in the gradual evolution of a more perfect order. We look out upon all things and see that they are very good."¹

Langton Douglas' experience in studying these paintings becomes a part of the experience of every lover of art and God. For as the individual, after an earnest and prayerful study of them, turns away to leave, he finds

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1. Langton Douglas; Fra Angelico, p. 152.

himself thinking in terms of eternity. The distinctive characteristics of these paintings which make possible such religious value certainly are worthy of study and consideration.

In examining the work of Angelico, a careful study will be made of all of his paintings; however, an evaluation regarding his work will include only his most recognized paintings. Furthermore, only those masterpieces concerning which critics of art are agreed as being strictly Angelico's will be studied in detail so that the distinctive characteristics of the paintings may better be known.¹ Since Angelico went through a remarkable transition period in his development as a painter, his paintings will be taken up in chronological order.²

Angelico's productive years fall naturally into four periods. During the first period, which extends from 1409 to 1418, he resided in Cortona and Foligno near Fiesole, Italy. The second and longest period, which closed in 1436, was passed in Fiesole. Throughout the third period, which extended from 1436 to 1447, San Marco was the artist's home. The last eight years were spent in Rome. However, since little is known of the first period, it will be omitted and the second period, because of its marked trans-

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1. Alois Wurm: Meister und Schulerarbeit in Fra Angelico's Werk, pp. 1-54.
2. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 26-28.



MADONNA DELLA STELLA

ition, will be divided into the First Fiesolian Period ending in 1433 and the Second Fiesolian Period ending in 1436.

B. A Study of Selected Religious Paintings

1. The First Fiesolian Period, 1418-1433.

The reliquary pictures were completed during the years spent at Fiesole and rightly belong to Angelico's first period. These small panels are four in number and originally formed the principal decoration of four little shrines in a church dedicated to the Madonna. These little pictures all form one connected series, in which are represented six scenes from the life of the Virgin. They are all miniature¹ paintings.

a. The "Madonna Della Stella"

The second panel represents the well known "Madonna Della Stella." The virgin is clad in a long blue robe lined in rich yellow satin. A clasp holds the robe lightly about her drooping shoulders, while with the left hand she caressingly covers the foot of the child with the robe. A stiffness is created by the folds in the robe. The golden background brings out the colors of the garment.

The child is seated on her left arm while with her

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1. Ibid., p. 28.



MADONNA DELLA STELLA

right hand she lightly supports his left arm. The "infant," being fully clothed, nestles close to her, pressing his little head against her cheek. There is an adult expression on the child's face and a quiet saintly expression on the face of the Madonna. Notice the curves in the unrealistic hands of the Virgin. The smallness of the chin and mouth of the Virgin adds formality to the painting. The nimbi on the heads of the mother and child are elaborate. However, in spite of the general atmosphere of stiffness, one soon becomes aware of the subtle means Angelico used to suggest the intimate connection between the Madonna, her life being ever divided between joy and grief, and the child.¹ The note of the whole representation is one of maternal tenderness, maternal anxiety. How well the curves in the garments unite the mother and child.

The architectural design of this panel is Gothic. There is interest in the angels painted on the border of the center scene. Angelico's angels will be studied in detail in the next period.

b. The "Coronation" of the Louvre.

The "Coronation of the Virgin" of the Louvre is one of Angelico's earliest works in tempera. The moment depicted is that of the Lord placing the crown on the Virgin's head

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1. Ibid., p.32.

while saints are standing and kneeling in awe and adoration. The Gothic canopy under which the principal personages are seated shows that the Dominican artist was entirely under Gothic influences. The steps in front of the throne are planned in the shape of half a hexagon, and in their main outlines harmonize with the half of the canopy above them. All the main lines of composition meet in the apex of the canopy. This structure determines and dominates the whole composition of the picture. The saints seem stiff and unreal in their piety. A description of these saints is given in the following lines:

"From both sides of the throne the hosts of the blessed contemplate the scene--apostles, bishops, and founders of monastic orders, all distinguished by their emblems. A charming group of saints of celestial grace is in the foreground: the kneeling Magdalene with her vase of ointment; St. Cecilia crowned with roses; St. Clara with her starry veil; St. Catherine of Alexandria leaning upon the wheel, the instrument of her martyrdom; and St. Agnes with a white lamb in her arms, symbol of innocence and purity. These youthful saints are endowed with heavenly beauty; they are visible souls rather than bodies--thoughts in human forms, enveloped in chaste draperies of white, rose-color, and blue, embroidered with stars--clad as happy spirits might be, who rejoice in the eternal light of Paradise."¹

c. The "Coronation" of the Uffizi

At the Uffizi is another representation of the same subject. Renouncing the Gothic throne, he places his glorious circlet in mid-air, above the clouds, in front of a

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 37.



THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN



ANGELS (DETAIL OF CORONATION)

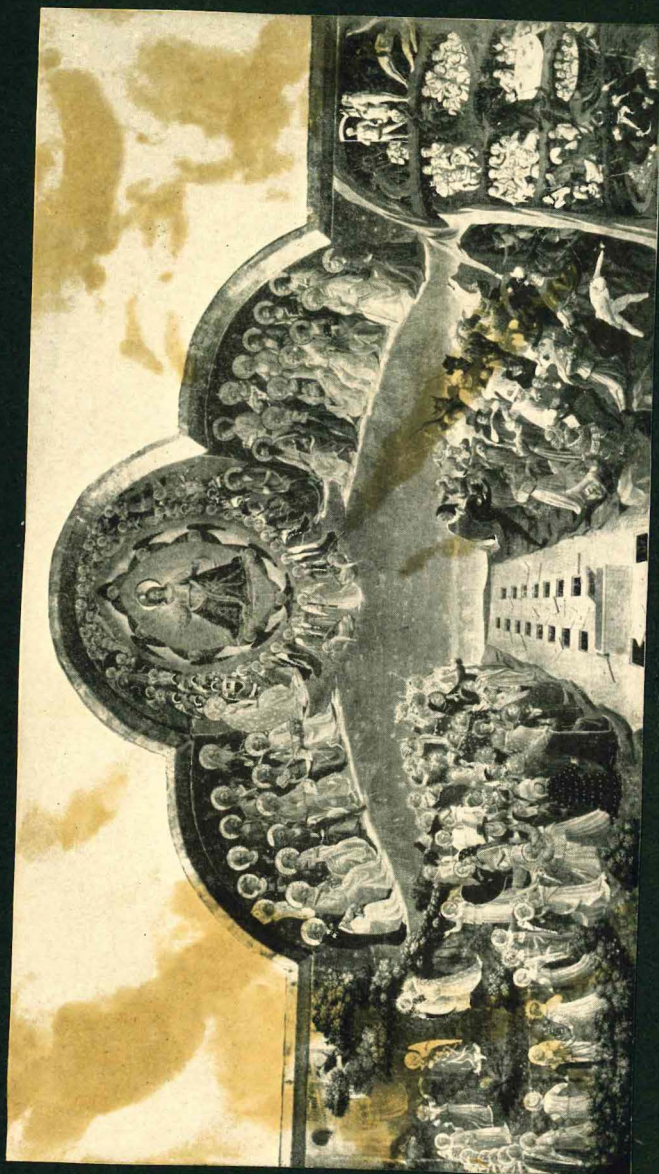
glowing background of golden rays. With hands crossed over her breast, the Virgin bends forward a little, as Christ, who is seated opposite her, places in her crown a jewel set in gold. A choir of angels is singing and playing to the right and left. The artist has introduced the long Florentine trumpets with admirable effect. On either hand, below, are grouped, so as to complete the circle, fifty saints, male and female. Here Angelico's power of harmonious and rhythmical composition is seen at its best. This composition is the last and the greatest of the friar's glorified¹ miniatures.

d. The "Last Judgment"

Another well known painting belonging to this period is the "Last Judgment" representing Christ surrounded by a mandorla of eight cherubim and, outside of these, a double circle of seraphim. Below, an angel bears the cross, and two other angels sound a trumpet of doom. Immediately to the right and left of Christ sit the Virgin and St. John the Baptist. Beyond them, on either side, are two rows of saints and apostles, the helpers of the Judge. Below all, in the center, is a cemetery with the graves open. On the one side of it is the throng of the blessed, whom angels are leading toward the city of God. On the other side are

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1. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 50-51.



THE LAST JUDGMENT
FRA ANGELICA

bishops, kings, nuns and monks, whom devils are thrusting down to hell. To the extreme right of the Judge are the gates of the new Jerusalem; to the extreme left, the seven circles of the Inferno. Between the groups of the blessed and the celestial portals is a space full of grass and flowers, where angels are dancing. Mr. Langton Douglas evaluates the picture thus:

"This picture, whilst it illustrates well Fra Angelico's early manner, is attractive rather because of certain passages in it than because of the general grandeur of the conception. The whole composition is stiff and formal to the last degree. The master is still banefully affected by Gothic influences, and he has not rid himself of the limitations of the miniaturist."¹

The composition is, however, strictly Angelico's. Symmetry and balance are marked.

The central figure is singularly disappointing. Although beautiful and ideal, Angelico's Christ, in this celestial triumph, is pale, and slightly emaciated. He is the eternal Friend, the Consoler, the merciful Lord which the saddened heart imagines, and not the over healthy figure of the Renaissance painters. He does not condemn; His countenance is turned toward the blessed, toward those whom He loves. The gestures of the hands of Christ speak welcome with the one hand held out, and rejection from the other. The Virgin, kneeling with downcast eyes, is represented in her "immaculate modesty" and "virginal candor."²

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1. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 33.



THE BLESSED (DETAIL, LAST JUDGMENT)



THE CONDEMNED (DETAIL, LAST JUDGMENT)

Mr. Douglas further characterizes the picture thus:

"There are no violent or eager emotions in this world that he paints; all is partially veiled, or arrested midway by the tranquillity or the obedience of the cloister."¹

But the splendor of the eternal day was disclosed to Angelico's eyes as he helps us to see the blessed approach paradise over luxuriant meadows strewn with red and white flowers.² There, flowers are from the artist's own beloved Fiesole. Angels, conducting the blessed, lovingly form a circle. The burden of the flesh no longer oppresses them for they glide through the air up to the flaming gate from which a golden illumination radiates. Christ, on high, smiles upon them. Empathy is created in the observer by the rhythm of Angelico's resurrection angels as they dance hand in hand.

As for hell, it appears feeble and childish. One soon realizes that the lovely mind of the angelic painter did not lend itself to such themes.³ There is no remorse, no suffering, no anguish written on the faces of those who are tortured. Even though diagonal lines are present, there is no apparent struggle and agony. They only seem startled and frightened in their piety; they seem to be merely pretending

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1. Ibid., p. 33.

2. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 50-52.

3. Marie A. Roulet: St. Anthony in Art, p. 117.

that they are hardened sinners.¹

Thus, even though the great contrast in Angelico's "Judgment" serves as a warning, yet on the whole, the painting fails to receive admiration.²

2. The Second Fiesolian Period, 1433-1436.

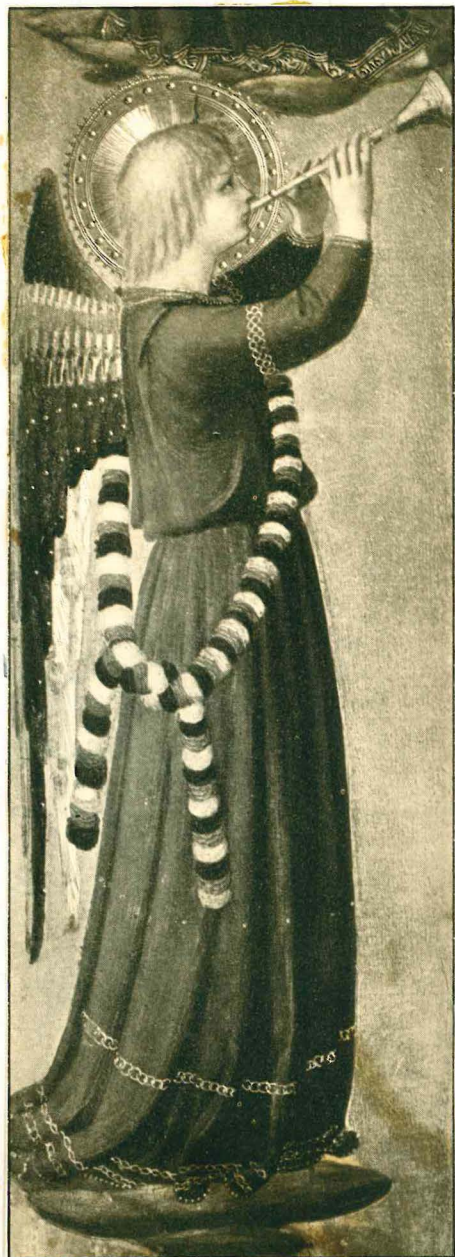
The second period of Angelico's artistic career was, as has been stated, pre-eminently a period of transition. During this period he painted four great Madonnas: the "Madonna dei Linajuoli," the "Madonna of Cortona," the "Madonna d'Annalena," and the "Madonna of Perugia." A study will be made of the first and the last of these four paintings.

a. The "Madonna dei Linajuoli"

The "Madonna dei Linajuoli" or the "Madonna of the Tabernacle" is triptych in form. The central panel, in which the Virgin is represented over life-size, is framed with Angelico's twelve famous angels which have caught the public fancy in a way that no other works of the artist have done.³ St. John and St. Matthew are represented on the inside of the doors; St. Peter and St. Mark are on the outside. The

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1. The scene of the "Blessed" and the "Damned" affords a good example of how critics may disagree. Some feel that hell is weak; others feel that the scene of the "Blessed" is weak. In such a circumstance, the writer will base the weight of the criticisms with one critic evaluating both scenes.
2. Douglas, op. cit., p. 53.
3. George C. Williamson: Fra Angelico, p. 12.



ANGELS (BORDER, MADONNA OF TABERNACLE)

border of angels will be considered before the representation on the panels.

(1) The Angels from the Frame of the
"Madonna dei Linajuoli"

This famous altar-piece is one of the least pleasing of Angelico's works. But of all the artist's creations it is the most popular and the most widely known. Furthermore, the twelve angels playing on musical instruments which adorn the beveled border of its central panel are generally considered as most typical of his art. Dr. Williamson gives the following criticism regarding them:

"Though graceful in form, pleasant in color, and certainly charming to look at, these angels are quite unworthy of being considered representative of the work of an artist, who was capable of painting the frescos of San Marco, and it is unfair to judge Fra Angelico by them. As a recent writer has said, 'What great painter before or since has ever been judged by his picture frames?' and these angels are nothing more than the flat decorations of the frame of the altar-piece, painted in soft colors on a gold background."¹

But weak and doll-like as these enlarged miniature angel figures are, there is something about them that has captivated the fancy of the public, and evoked the extravagant praise of the greater number of the artist's biographers.²

The angel with the trumpet is perhaps the most widely known of all of Angelico's angels. There is perfect balance in posture. A first-hand observer of the painting states

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1. Ibid., p. 12.

2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, pp. 37-38.



ANGELS (BORDER, MADONNA OF TABERNACLE)

the following about the angel:

"Tenderly worshipping is the gaze of its pure, far-seeing eyes . . . gorgeous is the vivid crimson of its trailing garments: wonderful the brilliance of its many eyed and golden wings: gleaming the subtle radiance of its mystic halo: marvelous the airy, free, and floating grace of its swaying figure, its upraised arm and firm white hand."¹

The painter cannot find colors pure enough for his angels. H. Taine describes the coloring thus:

"Tints are not increased or decreased nor intermingled as in ordinary painting. Each vestment is of one color; red contrasted with blue, bright green with pale purple, gold embroidery placed on dark amaranth, like the simple, sustained strains of an angelic melody."²

The ornate nimbus of the angel with the drum and the exquisite colors blended against the golden background are worthy of consideration. Angelico's harmony of color is superb in all of his angelic paintings.

Angelico's angels are like lovable children, with minds unruffled by suspicion of evil. They do not think deeply but are in worship. The chaste beauty and purity of the angel with the panpipes is striking. Mrs. Jameson, the great art critic, says that Angelico's conception of the angelic nature is unapproached and unapproachable. She further says:

"Angelico's angels are unearthly, not so much in form but in sentiment, and superhuman, not in power but in purity. In other hands, any imitation of his soft ethereal grace would become feeble and insipid . . ."³

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1. Roulet, op. cit., pp. 119-20.

2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 33.

3. Roulet, op. cit., p. 121.



MADONNA OF THE TABERNACLE

These "paper-doll angels" have so much sentiment of beauty in them that even Michelangelo, the lover of muscular construction and heroic nudity, said regarding them, "Surely the good monk visited Paradise and was allowed to choose his models there."¹

The angels trust to their wings with a certain confidence. Empathy is created as the eyes follow the many curved lines, until the angels do not seem to fly or walk but to float along "smooth and gliding without step."² The use of curves in the postures, the figures, the faces and hands and fingers of these heavenly beings create a soft and effeminate effect.

(2) The Panels of the "Madonna dei Linajuoli"

The central panel represents the virgin seated on a throne covered with rich brocade which is highly decorated with gold and silver. She is wearing a blue robe and rose tunic. Again with her left hand she holds the child who is standing on her lap. He is clothed in a long garment and holds a globe in his left hand, while the right hand is raised in blessing.

The Madonna is weak in feature. Here again is the repetition of her small chin and mouth, her drooping shoulders

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 31.

2. Roulet, op. cit., p. 121.

and flat bosom; her posture is cold and dignified. The child's gesture as well as expression is that of an adult. Neither proportion nor draperies are in the remotest degree possible for a child. No suggestion of the child's weight is given on the lap of the Madonna. The size of the globe is not in proportion with the size of the child's head. Stiffness is created by the folds in the robes of the Virgin and the child. These lines tend to separate them from each other.

The two side panels are really more characteristic than is the central panel of the manifest influence of both Masaccio and Ghiberti. These massive, well-modelled figures make a new departure in the artist's life. They are boldly conceived with muscular limbs. But even though the workmanship is good, the contemplation of them leaves one cold.¹ Angelico was not yet at home in his new manner, and could not as yet express himself completely in it. However, this painting has to a peculiar degree the characteristics of a picture of transition. Angelico is leaving behind the style of the miniaturist and is reaching out for the technique of fresco painting.

b. The "Madonna of Perugia"

The last of the Madonnas in this series of four is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful of Angelico's altar

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1. Douglas, op. cit., p. 61.

pieces. It belongs entirely to the early Renaissance. The Virgin is seated under a characteristic Renaissance canopy which bears the stamp of Michelozzo's growing influence. The Madonna regards the baby with motherly solicitude and tenderness. He is standing on her lap and leaning against her arm and side. In his left hand he holds a pomegranate; his right hand is raised in blessing. In this picture he is represented almost entirely in the nude. Moreover, he is represented as a real baby, with rounded limbs and a sweet infantile expression. The whole conception of the mother and child has become more human and intimate.

On either side of the Virgin are two angels bearing roses in flat baskets. "These roses," says Dr. Williamson, "abound in the city of Cortona to this day and are sold in similar baskets in the market places."¹ Thus we see an attempt on Angelico's part to represent nature in this painting and to represent it accurately.

Also in the figure of John the Baptist which is part of the altar-piece of Perugia we find a great change. Of all the beautiful figures that Angelico left us, few are more beautiful than his St. John the Baptist in this altar-piece. The attractive face, with its fine brown eyes, is exquisitely modelled. The hands too are full of expression.

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1. Williamson, op. cit., p. 30.

And how firmly the legs of this young prophet are placed on the ground.

This period then may be characterized as a period of transition when Angelico puts aside the cramping influences of the miniaturists and paints over life-size figures, thus preparing himself for the fresco paintings in the remaining two periods. In this period, he also makes use of a new medium, namely, tempera.

3. The San Marco Period, 1436-1447.

Before taking in hand the monumental task of Angelico, his fresco paintings in the convent of San Marco, a study will be made of one of his principal works in tempera during this period, the "Deposition." Then three of his greatest fresco paintings, "Christ as a Pilgrim," the "Crucifixion," and the "Annunciation" will be studied.

a. The "Deposition"

The disciples are represented in the "Deposition" lowering the body of Christ from the cross. This group occupies the center of the composition. A group of women stand on the left: Mary Magdalene, conspicuous by her long yellow hair and red robe, kisses the feet of Christ, and the Madonna gazes upon them in an ecstasy of grief. On the right hand, the disciples discuss with melancholy gesture, the sad event. The artist has introduced the portrait of

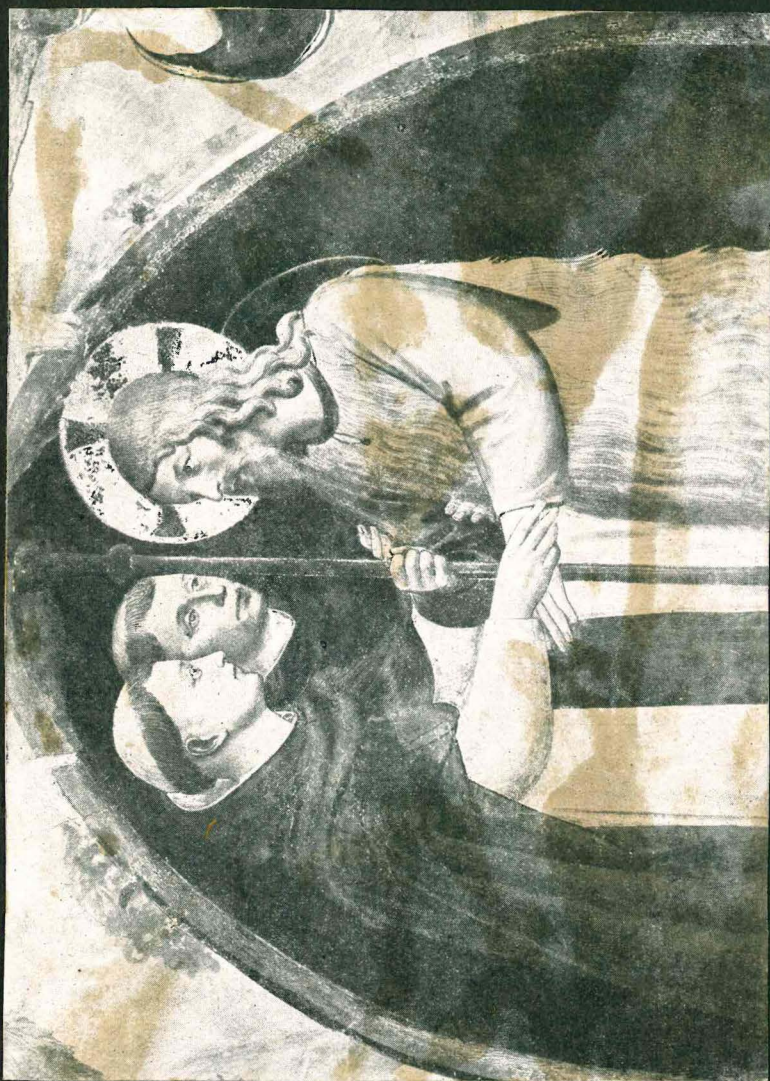
his friend, Michelozzo, in¹this picture.

The nude body is intelligently rendered in nobility and form. However, the weight of a dead body is not felt as in Ruben's "Deposition." Advance is shown in the drawing and modeling of the drapery and form. The landscape in the background shows defect in perspective; however the hills shade off delicately against the blue of the sky. The composition is excellent, in spite of many figures and detailed background. The artist attempts to give expression to nature in rendering the skies, the trees, the rich covering of grass and flowers. The angels in the sky, which are so characteristic of Angelico's earlier paintings, do not appear in many of the latter pictures of this period.

Perfect peace and quiet prevails in this scene as the realization comes over these men and women that their Beloved is dead. No outburst of emotion finds place in this scene. The faces, and the gestures, that are so well suited to the faces, speak of innocence, piety, timidity, and for the most part, they appear weak. This is especially evident in the man showing the pegs and the crown of thorns to his friend. The headgears and nimbi of the various individuals are worthy of study.

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1. Douglas, op. cit., p. 81.



*THE DOMINICAN MONKS MEETING
CHRIST*

b. "Christ as a Pilgrim"

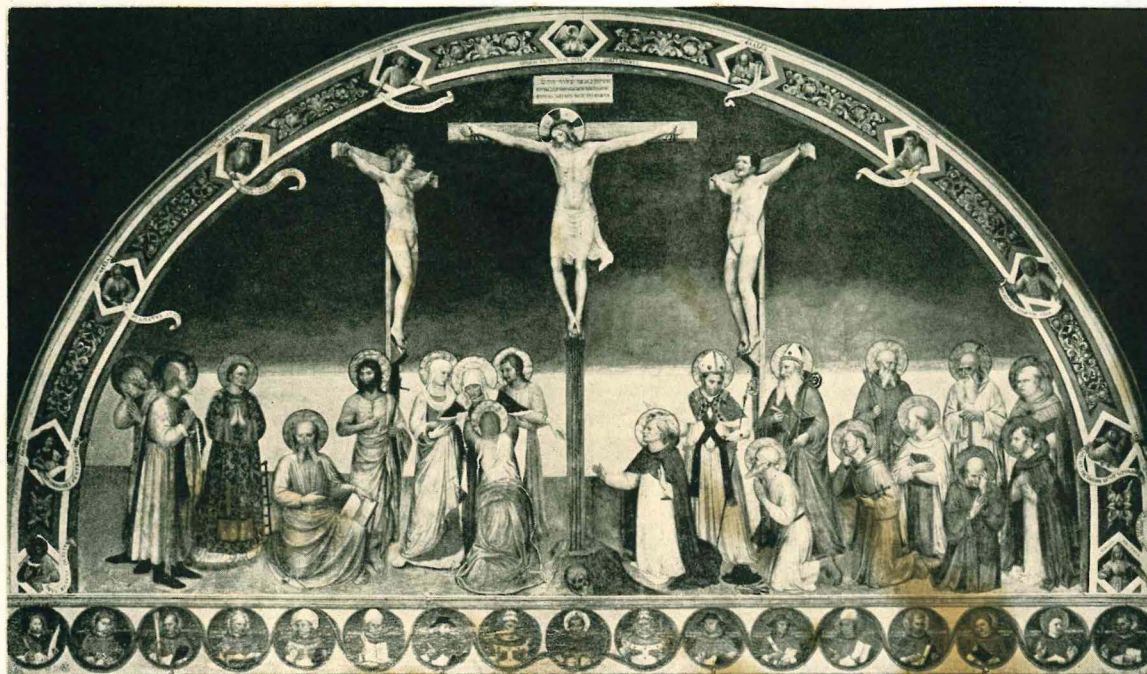
"Christ as a Pilgrim" is the most beautiful of the lunette paintings over the five doorways of the cloister. It is placed over the entrance of the hospitium.

Christ is represented with a friar beard and beautiful wavy hair falling down to his shoulder. With His right hand He clasps the pilgrim's staff: His left hand is held by one of the monks, who looks in His eyes with loving anxiety; while the other monk caressingly clasps Christ's right arm with both hands. The tall staff divides the lunette into two halves, right and left. The left arm of Christ and the right arm of the Dominican are both extended horizontally, the hands joining in front of the upright staff, thus forming a cross. No doubt the artist introduced it here to signify that the cross is the symbol of love, and that self-giving is the first effect and proof of love.¹

These two monks, full of self-forgetful sympathy and tender solicitude, greet this pilgrim, not knowing that He is divine, as representatives of Christ. These faces signify, spiritually, certain great monastic virtues as silence, obedience, self-sacrifice, enthusiasm for divine learning, and brotherly love. The simplicity of the composition and the deep religious sentiment expressed here are characteristic of Angelico's lunette paintings.

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1. Ibid., p. 87.



THE CRUCIFIXION



THE CRUCIFIXION (DETAIL)
THE SAINTS

c. The "Crucifixion"

Though the largest of Angelico's works, the "Crucifixion" was never finished. Christ is represented hanging between two thieves. The one gazes enraptured at the Savior; the other, in blasphemy, turns his head away from Him. Below, at the foot of the cross, a little to the right, are the three Marys. The Virgin, half-swooning with grief and horror, is being supported by St. John and the Magdalene. Angelico has depicted the death of Christ rather as a sacred mystery than a historical event, introducing various saints and founders of religious orders as spectators of the scene. Amongst these are portraits of two of his contemporaries, Giovanni Dominici and S. Antonino.

Half figures of prophets bearing scrolls adorn the arch of the simulated frame, and medallions containing portraits of the most illustrious members of the Dominican Order form a frieze underneath the picture.¹

In the treatment of nude bodies Angelico did not choose bulky powerful forms, but as a rule, forms that were somewhat attenuated, somewhat aesthetic, taking for models,² perhaps, some of his brethren at the convent. The tactile sense is not strong. His whole treatment of form is with

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 39.
2. Douglas, op. cit., p. 84.



THE ANNUNCIATION

aesthetic purpose, attempting to render both the material and spiritual. The reactions in the different saints are of interest: one with his hands tightly clasped, gazes at his dying Lord; another, unable to endure the sight, turns away to weep. The unrealistic streams of blood on the beam of the cross and the skull are there to speak of death and its gruesomeness.

d. The "Annunciation"

Facing the door of entrance to the upper corridor of the cloisters is the fresco of the "Annunciation." One art critic describes the scene as follows:

"The fair-haired Virgin, clad in a pale pink dress and dark blue mantle, seated upon a rough wooden stool in an open loggia, reverently receives the message brought to her by the angel, who, with wings still outspread as if he had just alighted from heavenly heights, bows before her whom he hails as the chosen one of God. His pale rose-colored robe is edged with gold, and his wings glow with delicate tints of rose, and violet, green and yellow. Through the arches of the slender columns we see a garden where the grass is starred with daisies, and beyond its wooden paling, rose-bushes and tall cypress-trees grow. An evening light enhances the holy calm that pervades the scene."¹

Extreme simplicity marks this painting when contrasted with the "Annunciation" of Cortona and that of Madrid. The color scheme is simpler. Less symbolism is used for here is no Adam and Eve in the background representing the Fall; neither is there a holy dove descending on the Virgin.

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 40.

However, there are flowers which may indicate not only the friar's love for nature, but testify to nature's joy at the removal of the curse and the coming of the Lord.

In this picture there is a striking instance of the friar's readiness to observe and to use the pictorial elements that presented themselves to him in the little world in which he moved. The two capitals and pillars supporting the loggia are of the Ionic order and are careful copies of those Michelozzo had just completed in the cloister below.¹

4. The Period at Rome, 1447-1455.

Angelico was summoned to Rome after he had spent over a decade at San Marco. During this period he painted a series of thirty-five panel pictures dealing with different scenes in the life of Christ. The last of his Madonnas, the "Madonna del Bosco," and the crowning work of his life which was done in fresco were painted during these last eight years.

a. Panel Series of the Life of Christ.

In this series of pictures, those of which are directly ascribed to Angelico, it becomes evident that he was in sympathy with the trend in Rome, namely, the "return to antiquity" and the "return to nature." His enthusiasm for the revival of classical form, i.e., the Corinthian and

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1. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 93-97.



THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT

Ionic Capitals, and his eager quest for nature in the treatment of flowers and trees, is quite evident. The faces of some of his personages take on more character and individuality. Intimate relations of thought and emotion as in the "Flight into Egypt" in which the gentle mother clasps the babe to her breast become common. In this same picture a remarkable improvement in distant perspective is seen, the hills appearing colder and grayer as they near the horizon.¹

b. The "Madonna del Bosco"

The last panel picture of the Madonna comes in this period. The child, entirely nude, leans lovingly against his mother while her face is full of tenderness. In this picture, tendencies which realized gradual growth in Angelico's earlier Madonnas are more fully developed.² The intimacy of relationship is more strongly emphasized than ever before. However, Angelico presents the Madonna with the same formal tip of the head and the background of either rich curtains or some architectural canopy throughout his painting career.

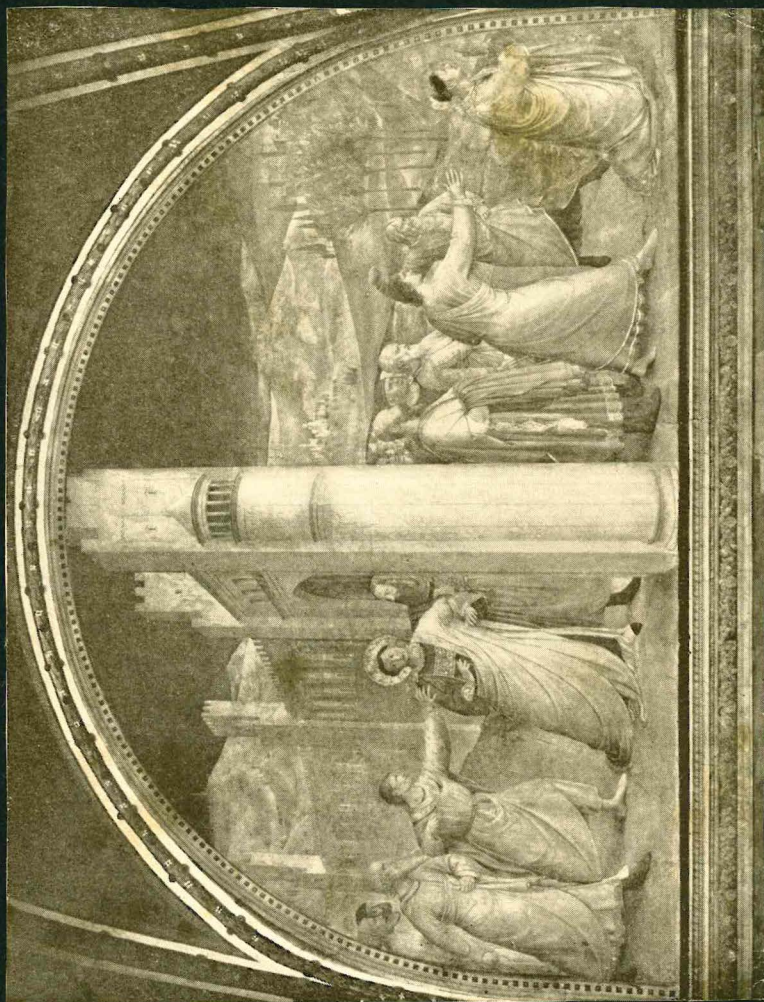
c. Scenes of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence.

In the winter of 1447-48, Angelico began the decoration of the little square chamber known now as the Chapel

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1. Ibid., p. 109.

2. Ibid., pp. 116-117.



MARTYRDOM OF ST. STEPHEN

of Nicholas V. On three of the walls of this small oratory he painted in two tiers, one above the other, six scenes from the life of Stephen and five from that of St. Lawrence. These two series of frescos, executed when the artist was sixty years of age, represent his highest achievement, not only in technical skill and in modeling, but in freedom and dramatic power.¹ The two reproductions here given represent a scene of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence respectively.

(1) "Martyrdom of St. Stephen"

In the "Martyrdom of St. Stephen," the Saint is kneeling in prayer in the extreme right of the picture. Nearer its center, and placed a little in the background, is the powerfully built form of an old man who is about to hurl a stone at the proto-martyr. In front is another well-modeled figure, whose right arm is extended as though a stone had at that moment left it. On the left stand a group of Pharisees, stern, conscientious, relentless; and prominent among them is Saul, who holds the clothes of those who are slaying St. Stephen. In this last massive figure we trace again the effects of the friar's studies of the creations of his contemporaries.

The clustering hills capped here and there with castle towers and the cypresses looming black against the grey

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, pp. 40-41.

slopes beyond speak of the scenery about his own home Fiesole. This scenery is similar to that of the "Deposition" and the "Flight into Egypt." There is a noticeable improvement of aerial perspective.

(2) "St. Lawrence Giving Alms"

In this fresco, St. Lawrence is distributing alms to the poor, the widow and orphan, the maimed, the halt, the blind. The figure of the saint, richly clad in ecclesiastical vestments glowing with color, the architectural background of columns closed by the apse of the church, and the expressive faces and attitudes of those standing about St. Lawrence, make up a scene which is generally¹ considered the greatest of all Angelico's works.

The mother clasps the infant to herself while the child caresses its mother's neck with its tiny hand. The two children, brother and sister, are sharing each other's joy as they go away with their common gift. The background is now taken up with architecture of Rome which before in his earlier period was given over to angels. The strong figure of the lame man shows good form. In the hand the old man extends to receive the gift, there is a good example of the type of hand that is most usual in the friar's later work.²

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1. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 128-29.

2. Ibid., p. 128.

C. Religious Values Derived
from Distinctive Characteristics
of the Paintings

1. Growth in Content and in Presentation.

a. The Development.

(1) The First Fiesolian Period

During the first period, all the paintings are in miniature form. Many of the faces of the figures are the size of a finger nail but marked out with a perfection so complete, that if magnified to natural size, they still scarcely show a mark of imperfection.¹ He painted with very bright clear colors on golden backgrounds. The figures appear stiff, wooden; the faces are conventional. Especially the Madonnas characterize the paintings of Giotto but with added sweetness. Nearly all the paintings deal with some incident in the Virgin's life. Unreal Medieval backgrounds and frequent use of Gothic Architecture characterize his early works.

(2) The Second Fiesolian Period

A bolder, freer style is evident in this period, the paintings being over life-size. His first Madonna is cramped and very stiff and formal, but there is more character and reality and truth in the rendering of the last Madonna. A change in style is sensed especially in his

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1. H. H. Powers: Mornings with Masters of Art, p. 107.

drawing and modeling of the human body: in his treatment of linear perspective, and in the decorative use that he makes of architectural forms. The Madonna and child is his favorite subject during this period. Angels are still found present in most of his paintings, the background being quite remote from his actual surroundings and highly ornamental.

(3) The San Marco Period

The faces of his personages are no longer mere traditional types but they take on character. His paintings have numerous historical portraits as well as those of living personages. Less symbolism is used; nature finds a real place in his paintings. Gold and silver backgrounds give way to more neutral hues; the settings of the paintings are not of another world but the convent and the scenery about it is utilized. The Virgin is not as central in his paintings as in the previous periods but many of his subjects deal with incidents in the life of the historic Christ, His healing ministry, His passion and death and resurrection.

(4) The Period at Rome

In this period, we find the paintings to be more human, yet no less heavenly. More attention is given to individual character and feeling; lines become more purely functional; more strength is given to modeling, making the observer realize roundness, bulk and pressure; a more robust ideal of

manhood and womanhood is given; a real interest in nature is evident as well as in rendering it correctly in regard to perspective. The background is now made up of city walls, streets and scenes in Rome. His subjects are varied but climax in his portrayal of incidents in the lives of the saints of the Church. There is also a striking interest in classical antiquity showing that the painter-monk¹ was in touch with the progress of the times.

b. The Meaning

Fra Angelico in his earlier paintings does not readily associate the Deity with the mundane and ordinary. His God is a transcendent God. The Virgin and the Child, executed meticulously, are not subject to human expressions of intimacy. The settings of his paintings are removed from the actual world about him. His personages are conventionalized and characterless--distant in space and sentiment from this earth.

In the later paintings, Angelico weaves² into the celestial world figures and forms of those with whom he has associations in San Marco and Rome. His settings are in convents, in the open fields, in the streets and buildings of Rome. The Madonna's maternal relationship to Christ is felt; Christ's humanity becomes more evident. The

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, pp. 40-41.
2. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 26-28.

personages become individuals aware of one another, sharing one another's religious sentiments. Thus the immanence of God is the new note that is struck in Angelico's later works.¹

2. Values in Composition

a. Harmony in Color

In color, Fra Angelico is noted for his love of the pure elemental tints of clear sharp blue, of an exquisite rose, of a vivid green, of gold and of pure brilliant white. I. B. Supino states that,

"His clear, diaphanous transparency of coloring is not used from lack of technical ability, but to approach more nearly to his ideal of celestial visions-- a species of pictorial religious symbolism."²

These transparent clear colors are most cunningly combined so as to produce a harmony that is most delightful. Art critics agree that Angelico excels in producing exquisite harmony in color. This perfect harmony which the painter felt so keenly in his use of color may be indicative of the spiritual harmony possessing his soul.

b. Serenity in Line

Angelico uses primarily the line of rest and quiet indicating serenity, relaxation and meditation. Much use is made of the curved line, in particular, the slow curve,

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1. Douglas, op. cit., pp. 26-28.

2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 34.

the line of delicacy, quietness and restraint.¹ These lines adapt themselves readily for heavenly representations where all is quiet, where struggle ceases. The serenity that Angelico portrayed so perfectly may be indicative of spiritual serenity, which he came to possess by projecting his feelings into the realm of the eternal.

c. Brilliancy in Value and Mass

Fra Angelico's world in painting is a strange one. His paintings abound with celestial beings; at times, his settings are arrested midway between heaven and earth; at other times, his personages are placed on clouds, knowing neither time nor space. On these visions he loved to shed a brilliant glow with subtle shading to intensify the brightness.² He could not interpret the eternal with shadows. The sun of Paradise illumined these realms.

d. Sincerity in Form

Fra Angelico's greatest concern did not take in the excellence of the elements in art, although he always was an eager student and ever tried to improve his art.³ Angelico never paints form from a purely scientific point of view, that is, to show texture, volume, foreshortening or to demonstrate perspective. The painting of Andrea del

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1. Louise Dudley and Austin Faricy: The Humanities, pp. 153-157.

2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 35.

3. Douglas, op. cit., p. 148.

Castagno is quite in contrast to Angelico's when he states:

"To render form, to give roundness and solidity, to the figures I paint, to make them stand out well from the surroundings, to enable people to feel that they can walk around them, that they will yield resistance to pressure, to stimulate, in short, their sense of touch --that is the one thing needful in painting, that shall be my one great aim as an artist."¹

Castagno's massy, bulky personages in his paintings do not add much to an aesthetic experience, for they seem to be stepping down out of the picture and making straight for the observer. Angelico realized the importance of tactile consciousness but he also realized the importance of correlative truths of art limiting and qualifying a painting. Angelico's figures do not only live in their framework but possess a spiritual quality and sensitiveness that surpass even the works of Masaccio² in this aspect. Thus in the presentation of form, he endeavors primarily to present the spiritual but never to cease striving for a more perfect way of giving form to this inward picture.³

e. Simplicity in Composition

Vasari states that Angelico showed profound intelligence in the arrangement and composition of his paintings.⁴ Simplicity of composition as a rule marks his pictures. Perfect balance and rhythm facilitate agreeable empathy in

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1. Ibid., p. 185.
2. Ibid., p. 146.
3. Ibid., p. 148.
4. Roulet, op. cit., p. 111.

composition. The "Last Judgment" illustrates this superbly. Angelico never marred or overloaded his pictures by irrelevant accessories that would distract attention or spoil the desired effect.¹

3. Values in Subject

It has become evident, in the study of all the available paintings of Fra Angelico, that many of his paintings have as their subjects incidents in the life of the Virgin. Paintings depicting her dormition, assumption, coronation, and marriage are numerous; over twenty-three paintings represent the "Madonna and Child" and no less than seventy-five include the Virgin as one of the major personages in the painting.

Angelico seldom if ever used the Old Testament as a source for his subjects other than for the decorative portraits of the prophets. He rather turned to the traditional saints of the church for subjects, identifying the most prominent ones with the symbols associated with them. They are usually represented with the Virgin, sometimes fifty or more, sharing some important event in her life. After his residence in Rome, the Pope as well as scenes in the ecclesiastical buildings are represented in his paintings.

Various incidents from the life of Christ are represented in Angelico's art. Among these the "Crucifixion" is

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 35.

the most prominent one, which he painted at least fifteen times. Women hold an important position in the paintings representing the life, death and resurrection of Christ. They appear chaste and modest and usually are in a group somewhat to themselves. The Virgin is an important personage in many of these pictures.¹

Angelico was very closely associated with the Church. His interpretation of religion was in terms of the Church. He painted what the Church taught; her legends, her saints, her dogma and ritual were his subjects. He painted nothing that was out of harmony with the teachings of the Church.²

4. Values in Treatment

Vasari states that since the study of the nude body was forbidden to a monk, Fra Angelico

.. "concentrated all his feeling for physical beauty, all his capacity for dramatic expression, on the faces of his saints and angels, and became a unique exponent of religious sentiment."³

Angelico took great pain in painting details. Nothing short of perfection was satisfactory to him. The meticulously decorated nimbus of the angel with the drum is noteworthy; likewise the heavenly expressions on the faces of the saints. To Angelico, the saints were precious; the angels, messengers, attendants of Christ and the Virgin.

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1. Frida Schottmüller; Fra Angelico Da Fiesole, Des Meisters Gemälde in 359 Abbildungen, Edition II, pp. 1-152.
2. Ibid.
3. Masters in Art, February, 1903, p. 31.

H. Taine well expresses the religious sentiment Angelico had for them:

"... he cannot find colors for his saints pure enough or ornaments sufficiently precious. He forgets that his figures are images; he bestows the faithful care of a believer, of a worshiper, upon them: he embroiders their robes as if they were real; he covers their mantles with filigree as fine as the finest work of the goldsmith; he paints complete little pictures on their copes; he delicately unfolds their beautiful light tresses, arranges their curls, adjusts the folds of their tunics, carefully defines the round, monastic tonsures on their heads; he even follows them into heaven that he may love and serve them there."¹

5. Values in the Impressions of Whole

Resignation is an underlying characteristic that marks Angelico's personages. His treatment of women is very indicative of this characteristic for they never show violent emotions or loud weeping under any circumstances. Especially in the "Deposition" this submissive obedience may be seen in their bowed forms, and again in the face and form of the Virgin in her flight to Egypt. The poor and suffering about St. Lawrence, likewise, indicate that they have accepted their hardships.

Even in paintings of bloody scenes such as the "Massacre of the Innocent," the soldiers go to take the life of the children in the spirit of resignation to the command of the king. The mothers offer little resistance. In the paintings of martyrdom, the proto-martyrs await

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1. Ibid., p. 33.

patiently the sword of death. In the "Last Judgment" the damned seem resigned to the awaiting torture.

Angelico painted this sentiment of resignation especially forcefully on the face of Christ on the cross. As his life will be studied it will become evident that this spirit of submission, obedience and acquiescence permeated and colored all of his thinking and painting.

Sheldon Cheney states that Angelico's pictures are ". . . atmosphere and feeling incarnate. They breathe simple holiness, quietude, adoration."¹ He says:

"Fra Angelico achieved in his paintings exceptional sensuous loveliness. But he transcended mere decorative picturing because he had the genius that enabled him to put this other vitality or power or feeling into his pictures: this element that we call holy or spiritual because we cannot find other words to suggest its balm to the spirit, its profound quietude, its evocative sweetness."²

Thus these pictures transport the soul into the mystical Presence, there to partake of timeless rapture.

D. Summary

In this chapter the paintings of Fra Angelico have been observed in a first hand study. Selected religious paintings were considered in chronological order because of the innovations which characterize them. Definite aspects of growth were discovered in his paintings which

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1. Sheldon Cheney: Men Who Have Walked with God, p. 230.
2. Ibid., p. 237.

enriched and deepened their religious value. The elements in their composition were also noted: color, line, value, mass, and form. The subject matter was found to deal largely with saints, angels, and heavenly visions; the Virgin too was represented in many of Angelico's works. His treatment of his earlier paintings was characterized by great meticulousness; but a fuller, freer brush is used in his later pictures.

Lastly, certain religious values such as resignation, holiness, quietude, and mystic spirituality have been found to characterize all of his works, sentiments which make his works distinctive.

CHAPTER II

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE PAINTINGS OF MICHELANGELO AS INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGION

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THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE PAINTINGS OF MICHELANGELO AS INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGION

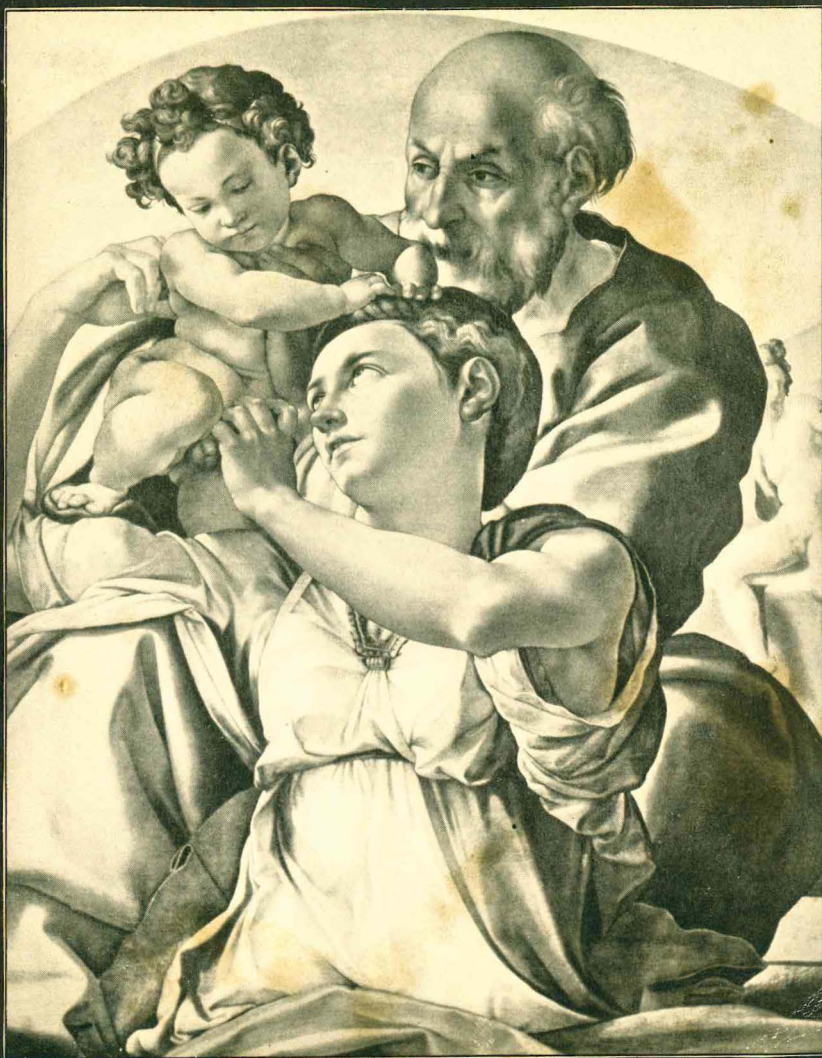
A. Introduction

In every collection of religious paintings where there are paintings of Fra Angelico's heavenly world, representations from another world are present, namely, Michelangelo's. Sculpture was really Michelangelo's domain for he writes in one of his beautiful sonnets: "It is only well with me when I have a chisel in my hand." Yet destiny so ruled that painting was thrust upon him. The few times he turned to painting without being forced, he painted non-religious subjects, with the exception of the "Holy Family." But the great majority of his paintings are religious subjects which were executed with a burning dissatisfaction in his breast. With this in mind, the paintings of Michelangelo will be taken up.

B. The Study of Selected Paintings

1. The "Holy Family"

The "Holy Family" was executed in 1503 for a prominent Florentine, Angelo Doni. In this picture Michelangelo has made Joseph appear as the most important personage in the



THE HOLY FAMILY

group, a rather anxious looking man, with a strong face and keenly penetrating eyes. De Tolnay concludes that it is very probable that the head of Joseph has been derived from the antique portrait of Euripides. Michelangelo here leads a crusade against the conventional presentation of the "Holy Family" in which Joseph is slighted or only the Virgin and Child are presented.

The Virgin as here represented is quite different from the other Madonnas of Michelangelo. Her chief beauty consists in the upward look of her large "Florentine eyes." Vasari was much moved by this "prophetic glance" of the Virgin as she hopefully sees the Savior as victorious hero of the world to come. The Virgin's head, form and muscular arms are those of a young man. It is the first time Michelangelo transposed ideal masculine beauty to feminine. In this he anticipates the Sibyls in the Sistine vault. The way the Virgin holds the child seems to come from the manner¹ of carrying vases in antique art.

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1. Vasari gives a description of the motif of the group which does not seem correct in that he states that the Virgin is giving the child to Joseph. It is the Virgin, according to Stearns and others, who receives the child from Joseph and not Joseph who receives the child from the Virgin. This problem has been discussed as long as the painting has been in existence and, even though the motif has not been solved, it certainly does not lack originality. However, the observer soon becomes more concerned about the problem in this picture than in its message. The reader is referred to: Frank P. Stearns: *Midsummer of Italian Art*, pp. 76-77.

In the background, Michelangelo shows a group of nude young athletes, inspired by Signorelli, who appear to signify the pagan world separated by a wall from the Holy Family. Christ, the upper figure in the picture, belongs to the world sub gratia according to the motif of the Middle Ages. The Virgin and Joseph belong to the sub lege which is below the world to which Christ belongs. These two worlds are contrasted to the world ante legem which Michelangelo represents by the Ephesian youths behind the wall. "Thus," writes De Tolnay, "Michelangelo synthesizes in this composition in globe form all the spiritual development of humanity."¹

The coloring of this painting is very different from contemporary artists who liked the harmony of warm colors. This painting is made up of clear, cool colors which give the impression of "colored marble." He used at the same time, changing color values. The Virgin's pink gown changes to clear yellow when the light touches it, her light blue mantle becomes white, and its green lining turns to golden yellow. Joseph's yellow robe changes to orange in the shadow. The beauty of the colors is put in relief by contrast. The pink of the Virgin's blouse is accented by the small brooch at her bosom; the blue of her mantle is relieved by a little spot of pink gown which projects from beneath it on the ground.

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1. Charles De Tolnay: Michelangelo, II, The Sistine Ceiling, p. 165.



There are no deep shadows in the picture but only half shadows which emphasize the "swelling forms" and which give the effect of "polished marble." Light and shadow serve only to bring out plastic values, and the suggestion of a plastic substance. This stands in contrast to the soft chiaroscuro of contemporary artists for whom light and shade¹ served to relate forms.

2. The Sistine Ceiling

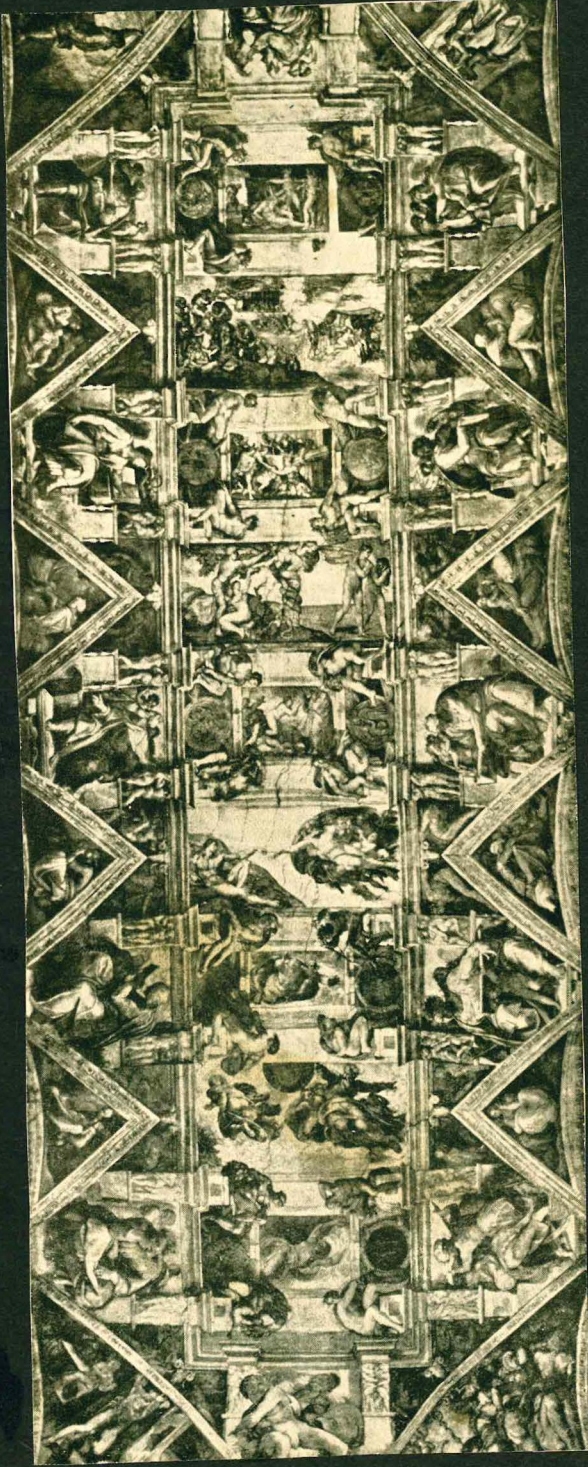
a. The Architecture

Before taking into consideration Michelangelo's artistic activity from 1508 to 1512, it is needful to describe in brief the theatre of his activity--the Sistine Chapel.

The Chapel was erected in 1483 under Pope Sixtus IV. Viewed from the outside it is an oblong brick building with travertine cornices and window frames. The clerestory consists of six tall windows at the right and left. The ceiling, seventy feet above the varicolored marble mosaic floor, is a flattened barrel-vault. The transitions from the longitudinal walls to the vault are made by pendentives which rise from the pilasters. Since the lunettes above the windows penetrate into the vault, it was necessary to create transitional arched recesses called spandrels. Thus an alternation of spandrels and pendentives resulted.

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1. Ibid.



THE SISTINE CEILING

Michelangelo included the pendentives in the main ceiling representation. Unification and simplification are obtained by these nine rectangular fields and by the large bands connecting the pilasters of the thrones on both sides. The entire vault is bound together in a coherent system of rhythmic alternations of small and large fields. Michelangelo succeeded well in bringing out the latent qualities of the pendentives, spandrels, lunettes, and especially adapted his figures to the material weight of the vault, as seen in the large seated figures of the Prophets and Sibyls pulling down the gigantic architectural skeleton on either side.¹

The Chapel was divided by a cancellato² into two parts, a presbyterium and a space reserved for the laymen. The artist, taking this into consideration, started with the first four histories of man--his fall, punishment and repentance--for the laymen area; in the remaining five he depicted the creation, or more exactly, the story of God, over the area of the clergy. In this latter division, the only representations of God are painted.

The architectural skeleton painted by Michelangelo divides the vault into three super-imposed zones. De Tolnay gives a brief description of these three zones and their

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1. The architectural structure of the ceiling is further discussed in De Tolnay's *Sistine Ceiling*, pp. 11-19.
2. Screen.

contribution to the painting as a whole:

"To these three zones, which are separated topographically and stylistically, corresponds a triple gradation of subject matter. The lowest zone, that of the lunettes and spandrels, clearly separated from the rest of the vault by large frames, depicts a race undergoing the daily vicissitudes of human condition. Inhabiting the second zone, i.e., the architectural skeleton, sit the large figures of Prophets and Sibyls surrounded by their Genii. Although they are human, they share in the divine by their intellectual and emotional faculties: they can ascend from earthly life, by virtue of knowledge, will and desire, to the divine. The nude adolescents, the "Genii of the souls" of the Prophets and Sibyls, who are situated in this same second zone and who give a frame to the histories, also seem to be spiritual echoes. The third and highest zone which appears behind the architectural framework contains the prototypes of man in his direct relation to the Divine and the history of God Himself. These three zones, in spite of their differing natures, are all bound together: man in the lowest sphere reflects unconsciously the attitudes of the Prophets and Sibyls, which in turn are the reflections of the Divine.

"When this triple gradation of the ceiling is once recognized, one can try to penetrate more deeply into the spiritual conception of the artist."¹

With this in mind, a brief description of the ceiling as a whole will be given beginning with the highest and most important zone which determines the ideology of the others.

b. The Representations

(1) The Histories

The "Drunkenness of Noah" is directly above the main entrance into the chapel. The reclining Noah is in the pose of an ancient fluvial god. "Although drunken he is Noah still," states Stearns, pointing out the beauty of his left

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1. Ibid., pp. 22-23.



THE TEMPTATION AND EXPULSION FROM EDEN

arm and torso.¹ His head with his hoary beard has fallen on his chest. His body is the "prison of the soul." This inherent tragedy of human existence reveals itself in the petrified figures of his sons. The spectator immediately recognizes the figure of Noah repeated in the man digging the earth in the background. The two main aspects of human servitude are revealed in these two representations of Noah. The Deluge was depicted as an "elemental cataclysm" characterized by the stormy sea, pouring rain, and lightning.² The "Sacrifice of Noah" is the last of the first three, picturing scenes from the life of Noah.

In the "Fall and Expulsion," the composition is no longer made up of planes of background relief but the large figures are contrasted with infinite space. The elements are no longer fixed according to hidden geometry but linked together in an organic and dynamic manner. The figures no longer seem stiff and statuesque, but there seems to be a "dynamic stream" proceeding from body to body. This new principle is felt in the representation of God, as a powerful old man enveloped by a large cloak, in the "Creation of Eve." The gesture of his right hand is like a magician's gesture. In the "Creation of Adam," God the Father has more of a celestial nature; he is a kind of anthropomorphic cloud which slowly floats toward the earth. The "dynamic stream" is

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1. Stearns, op. cit., pp. 102-103.
2. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 26.

about to be passed to Adam. This picture will be studied in detail.

In the three remaining paintings, Michelangelo desired to reveal the very essence of the Creator. It is therefore difficult to know the exact subject matter of these frescos. His mantle is oval in outline and shell-like in its protective character. In the "Separation of Heaven from Water" it seems likely that he represented the second day of the creation. Gray is the dominating color. The "Creation of the Sun and Moon" is described by De Tolnay as follows:

"God, like a planet, crosses the spaces of the universe in a whirling speed, describing an orbit. At the right he discharges celestial bodies with an eruption, like a bursting star throwing off meteors."¹

In the last fresco of this series, the "Separation of Light and Darkness," God seems to be a flat "shadow" gliding swiftly through space, with confused formless clouds about Him, making Him appear cloud-like in substance, soft, immaterial and formless. De Tolnay characterizes the scene thus:

"God seems to extricate Himself from primitive chaos in a swimming movement . . . An instinctive impulse urges Him to seek an escape from this gloom. He evolves from the folds of his mantle . . . His body is convulsively twisted . . . His outstretching arms grope with probing gestures in the welter which surrounds Him (it is the same gesture for liberation that Michelangelo will use later in his drawings of the Resurrected Christ); His eyes are closed as in blindness . . . This is a spirit seeking itself."²

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1. Ibid., p. 38.
2. Ibid., p. 40.

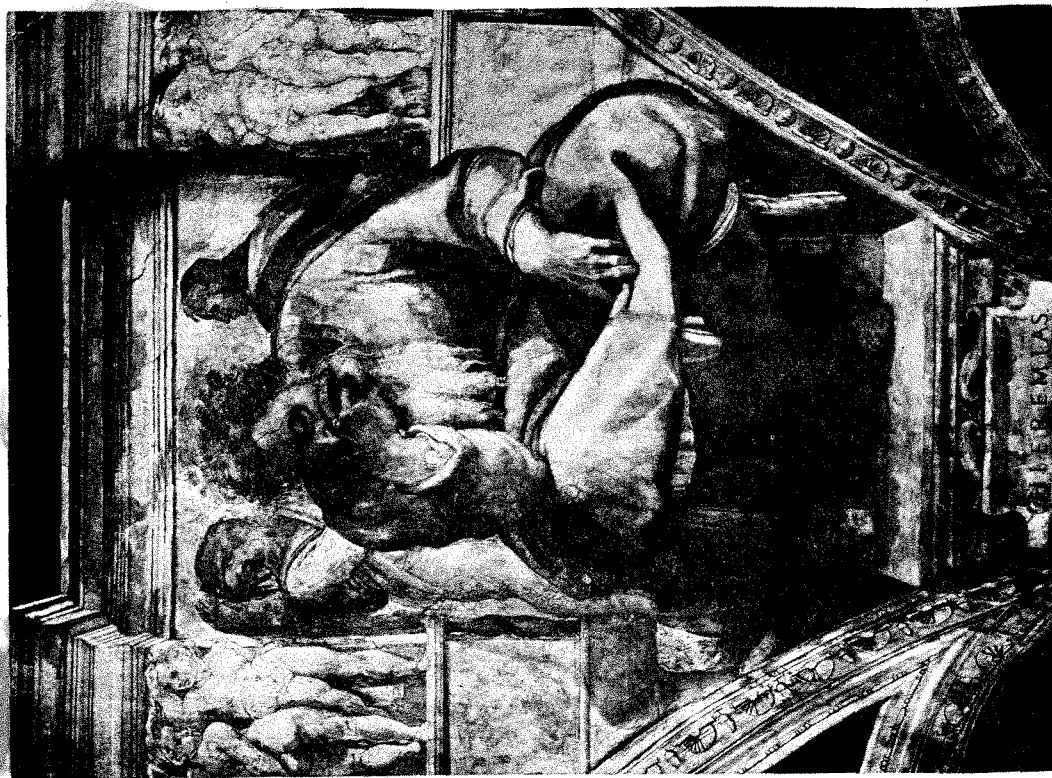
The colors help to assimilate the figure into the clouds. The lilac garment is here made of a smooth substance. Light and shadow seem to be properties of this substance itself. Around the Father's chest the lilac goes into pale blue, the brush strokes becoming more tender. The formless hands are of a pale color; only the face is somewhat darker.

(2) The Prophets

The nine histories are accompanied on both sides by the series of seers--gigantic figures seated as if freed from this earthly life. Because of their dimensions, the plastic modeling of their bodies, and the sudden movement of their limbs, these twelve figures are of almost equal importance as those of the histories. They are represented on twelve pendentives, seven being Prophets and five Sibyls.

The first prophet, above the entrance, is Zechariah, a robust old man seated on his throne. He is calmly turning the pages of his book to find the passage on which he will meditate. His eyebrows, however, and wrinkled forehead show his inner tension. The first Prophet on the lateral wall is Joel, beardless and middle-aged. While reading he seems overcome by a sudden emotion, and, distracted from the text, thinks on his inner vision.

The next figure, Isaiah, young and beautiful, appears even more intensely enraptured. He no longer cares for the written word and so has closed the book. His former lethargy



THE PROPHET JEREMIAH



THE LIBYAN SIBYL

is still evident in his crossed legs and in his invert arm; he now brings his body in an attitude of suspense. His cloak seems to be filled with spiritual wind. It is not as weighty as the cloak of the first two Prophets.

(3) The Sibyls

Michelangelo associates the Sibyls with the creation of the world, the creation of man and his fall, and the Deluge rather than with the coming and passion of Christ as was customary in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

In characterizing the Sibyl of Delphi, he most likely turned to the Aeneid. Her mantle and hair are lifted by the wind; her large eyes full of terror stare into the future. Her fully developed chin and nose could be that of a youth as well as a girl. Her muscular arms would be suitable for a youthful athlete. It is an image of original beauty before the differentiation in sexes, says De Tolnay.

The contrast of her raised and bent arm in one direction and her head and eyes in the opposite direction gives a dramatic quality to the figure. The Erythraean Sibyl has her appropriate place near the sacrifice of Noah because according to the Sibylline Oracles, she was Noah's daughter-in-law. She is conceived as a young, robust woman of perfect beauty. Viewed in profile, she crosses her legs and lets her right arm hang down inside of a fold in the garment. With the left hand she leafs through a book in a resigned state of mind. The Cumaean Sibyl has the features



DECORATIVE FIGURE

of old age in muscular build. She will be studied in detail. The Persian Sibyl is a humpbacked woman with deformed arms and legs. She tries to read the writings of a prophetic book. Her pale green robe is wrinkled with age. The only bright color is the pink cover of the book. The Libyan Sibyl, the last Sibyl in this series, is represented in a twisted position, the purpose for this movement of her body not being clear. In Vasari's opinion, she has finished her work and is closing the book and is about to rise. This double movement, the closing of the book and the act of departure, is expressed by the contortion of her body and by the outlines of her garment. Her youthful arms and torso are superbly painted.

It is noteworthy that Michelangelo made these studies from male models. Michelangelo tended toward modeling a superior beauty which synthesizes the beauty of both sexes.

(4) Complementary Representations

(a) Genii

Michelangelo represented the body, the soul and the intellect by nude Genii. This was in accordance with Neo-Platonism of the Renaissance and is seen in the paintings of the seers. Again, on the blocks surmounting the pilasters of the seer's throne sit adolescent nudes (twenty) of perfect athletic build, yet spiritualized by their expression. At the beginning they appear calm and

symmetrical, but as they progress toward the altar, there is a "crescendo" in movements and size.

Other Genii decorate other parts of the ceiling.¹

(b) Medallions

The Medallions accompanying five of the histories strengthen the interpretation of the histories. For example, the "Drunkenness of Noah" is accompanied by two brutal scenes--the "Killing of Joram" and the "Killing of Abner." All of the subjects of the Medallions with the exception of one are taken from II Samuel and II Kings.

(c) Spandrels and Lunettes

In the highest zone of the ceiling, the ineffable One is gradually revealed; in the second zone, those are revealed who through their intellect and soul participate in the divine; but in the third zone, simple mortal beings are represented who have no direct spiritual relationship with the seers.

In the spandrels, Michelangelo represented the family life of a nomadic humanity in exile. The men and women crouching on the ground show weariness and fear. The names of the spandrels represented are as follows: "Zorobabel," "Josias," "Ozias," "Ezekias," "Roboam," "Asa," "Salmon," "Jesse," etc. The bodies of those represented are huddled together but the soul of each remains solitary. They "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." These men, women



DAVID AND GOLIATH



THE BRAZEN SERPENT

and children neither speak nor look at each other but seem to be prey to the eternal fear of those condemned to a "continual peregrination."

On the contrary, the lunettes represent the domestic life of primitive humanity. In the middle of each field is a tablet bearing the names of the ancestors of Christ as found in Matthew 1:1-16. The child is the principal personage in these representations because the hope of the race is in the child. The parents' sole concern is the procreation and protection of these children who are the true links between the generations.

(d) Four Corner Spandrels

The four large spandrels in the corners of the ceiling represent the four "miraculous salvations" of the chosen people. These are not presented as heroic events, but as tragedies of destiny which unfold. They are representations of the following: "David and Goliath," "Judith and Holofernes," "The Punishment of Haman" and "The Brazen Serpent."

c. The Details

Because of the mammoth size of the ceiling--some ten thousand square feet in area--it is impossible to do justice to it in studying it first hand. Therefore, three pictures will be studied in detail; one is selected from the histories, the "Creation of Adam"; one from the Prophets, "Jonah"; and one from the Sibyls, "The Cumaean



THE CREATION OF ADAM.

Sibyl."

(1) The "Creation of Adam"

(a) The Anthropomorphic Cloud

De Tolnay well described God the Father and those enclosed within the cloud in the following lines:

"In the 'Creation of Adam' God the Father no longer has a human aspect, but a celestial nature; He is a kind of anthropomorphic cloud which slowly floats toward the small barren strip that represents the earth. His supple and extended body is escorted on all sides by a cohort of Genii, who gather about Him like children around their father. This whole group is enveloped by a large mantle swelling in the wind and forming a huge shell. This protective covering is soft and flexible and corresponds to the nature of its seeming element, the air. This is another metaphor in which Michelangelo returns to the original significance of the shell as it occurs in the ancient myths, that is, as a symbol of protection and fertility at the same time. God the Father is an infinite being carrying within Himself all the forces of the universe. He is softly reclining with His left arm and hand resting in complete ease on the shoulders of two of His Genii; the outstretching of a single finger of His right hand is sufficient to animate the titanic and still inert body of Adam. In this contrast of minimum effort and of immense effect the divine omnipotence is clearly manifest --a spiritual rather than a physical power.

"The infinite power of God the Father is also symbolized by the Genii whose bodies accompany the whirlwind movement created by the flight of God. Some of them fall forward, in imitation of the movement of the head of God; others sweep in the opposite direction, as an echo of the gesture of His left arm. Probably they are the Genii of the celestial spheres. Among these Genii the two that seem to stand out are those under the left arm and hand of God: a young woman and a child, the latter having the same aspect as the Christ Child in Michelangelo's earlier works (cf. Doni Madonna). It is very likely that the young woman who looks in fascination at Adam is a representation of Eve, or rather of the 'idea' of Eve. Since both are under the protection of God the Father, Michelangelo intended to show that they are already pre-existent in His intellect. This corresponds to the philosophy of humanism, [as presented in Dante's Paradiso] It is

the embodiment of the idea of Eve and Christ. So the whole future of man is synthesized in this group. In the mind of God the fate of humanity is present with the creation of the first man--a whole history of the world in brief. The Genii behind God the Father are symbolic of divine omnipotence; the Platonic 'ideas' of the Christ Child and Eve are symbolic of divine omniscience."¹

(b) Adam

Adam is half stretched out on a solitary slope. This figure of Adam has long been the subject of the highest praise. The two-fold character of line is well illustrated in this outstretched figure. Line serves first to define the objects represented, that is to show their contour and linear detail. But there is a more subtle language of line which the artistic intuition uses "with unconscious discrimination to translate the prose of nature into the poetry, the music of art."² The straight lines suggest force, rigidity; the curve means softness, grace, weakness; the angles suggest harshness, "aggression"; these connotations bring value and variety into the posture and expression of the human form.

The Adam, a virile, manly form, is drawn almost wholly in curves. A long, unbroken curve sweeps from the head through the central axis of the figure to the foot. A similar curve goes from the right armpit to the knees and is repeated from the knee to the foot. Similar curves bound

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

2. H. H. Powers: The Art of Michelangelo, p. 92.

the upraised left leg, the left arm, and perhaps the most expressive of all--the upper contour of the outstretched hand. The illustration will bring these curved lines out more forcefully.



It would be difficult to find ^amore striking example of the significant use of line than in the contrast of the hand of God and of Adam--the one alive, energized, the other limp and lifeless, waiting for the gift of life. If the whole ceiling should crumble, art critics feel that the story of giving and receiving of life would still be told completely

if these two hands were intact.

The face of Adam is no less expressive. His head is bent a little and his face shows the uncertain expression of one awakening from a deep sleep and opening his eyes in astonishment. The face stands in contrast to the richly modeled face of God, whose forehead is wrinkled with thought, and whose flowing and wavy beard suggests movement.

(c) Coloring

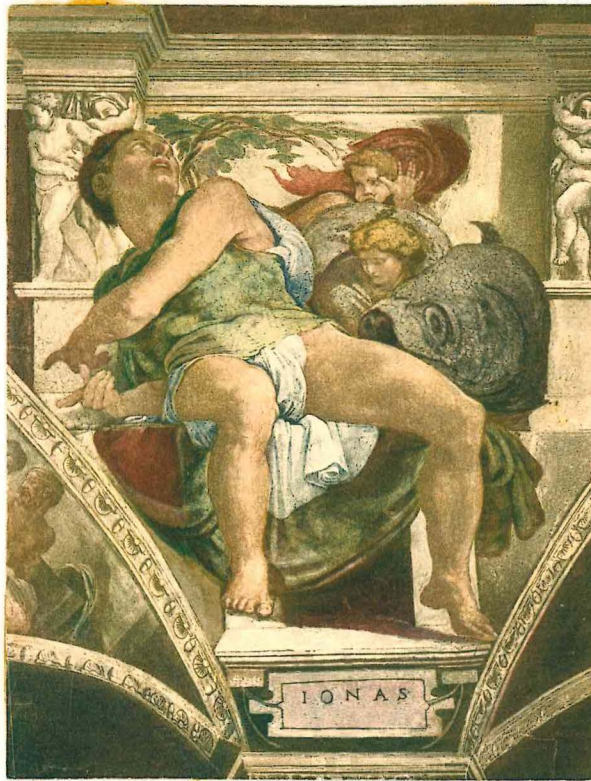
The soft and light gray-lilac chiton of God the Father, which in the lighter areas goes over into a pearly white, is surrounded by the violet shell-shaped mantle. The skin of God the Father is a light grayish pink, whereas that of the Genii is a brownish pink. The lilac is harmonized with the gray sky. The earth is deep green with the exception of the edge of the slope, which is blue. The shoulder drapery on the Genius below God the Father is pale green.¹

(2) "Jonah"

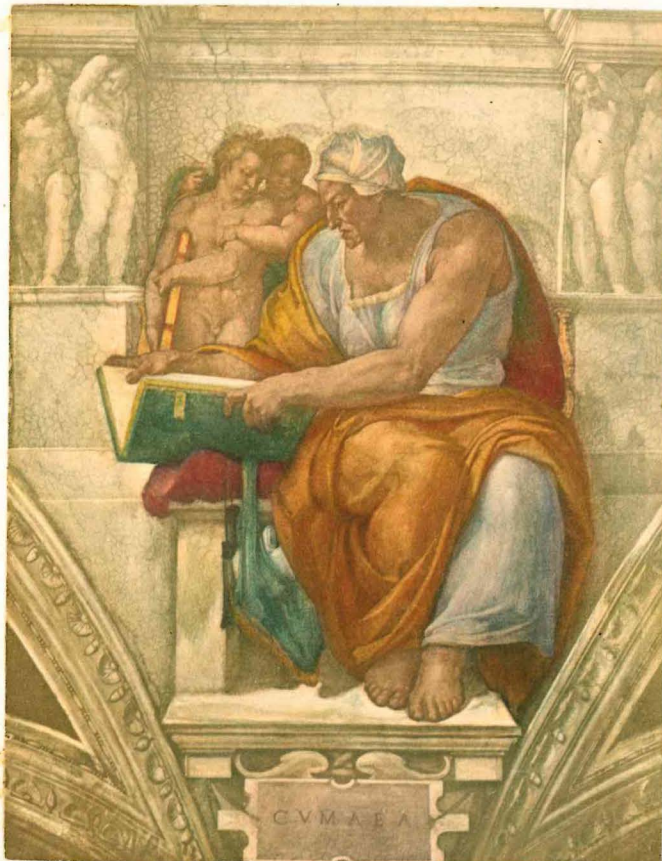
"Jonah," the last in the series, holds the place of honor in the ceiling, being represented on the wall of the altar. He is the only one who sees the Creator face to face. A study of the Bible text is clearly revealed here in the branch of the gourd and the monstrous head of the

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 37.



THE
PROPHET
JONAH



THE
CUMAEAN
SIBYL

fish describing fearful remembrances of his past. These with the two frightened Genii and with the curves of his mantle create an encircling whirlwind about his massive body. With the index fingers of both hands, Jonah is pointing to something below while his whole being is in ecstasy. There are several interpretations as to the moment depicted here.¹ However, all modern scholars are agreed that the reason for placing Jonah above the high altar is that Jonah is here a symbol of the resurrection of Christ.

The head of Jonah is of a brownish color. His waistcoat is a soft green which, in the lighter parts, becomes a rich yellow. The mantle draped over the throne has changing colors which go from a green to a purple in the darker areas. The first Genius has a yellow garment, the second a pink shawl. The fish is silvery gray.

(3) The "Cumaeen Sibyl"

The "Cumaeen Sibyl" has been open to much criticism and comment. "The ponderous arm, the mighty torso, the relatively small head," says H. H. Powers, "with its more than masculine ruggedness of countenance seem to justify the charge that the figure is unnatural, abnormal."² Michelangelo could draw average proportions of the human

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1. Ibid., p. 154.

2. Powers, op. cit., p. 124.

body but in much of his painting he made free use of deviating from nature. He had something to say that could be best said in this manner. H. H. Powers describes the purpose of her representation as follows:

"In this case it was something about prophecy, the communication of God's will to man. What is there about prophecy that is suggested by this dread creature? She is a powerful creature as witness the huge torso and terrible arm. She inspires an awe that is akin to terror, a will that we have no thought to withstand. All is consistently terrible."¹

The Cumaean Sibyl has the features of old age. She looks with a sense of disapproval at the text and the folds in her garment seem to pull her away from the book. The Genii, like evil gamins, are mocking her, they being the incarnation of the inner self-criticism of the Sibyl.

In contrast to the rich variety of colors in the earlier Sibyls, the Cumaean Sibyl is simple and sober in tones. A clear blue veil-like under-garment with a yellow border around her neck and a brownish yellow mantle around her back and over her knees are the dominating colors. They are complemented by a green (the cover of the book and knapsack) and a red (the pillow under the book).²

d. The Ceiling as a Whole

(1) Coloring

Michelangelo's coloristic unity finds its original

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1. Ibid., p. 126.

2. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 59.

matter in a marble-gray which appears in its pure state in the soft gray-white color of the architectural framework. All other colors seem to flow like liquid above this original color.

The coloristic composition shows the same triple gradation that the structure of the ensemble shows. There is a kind of ideal "aerial perspective" in the remote parts which are light and pale while the nearest are somewhat more vivid. In the upper central part the histories appear in pale colors; even the first histories, with their stronger local color are dominated by the stone-gray figures. In the last five, the soft gray-lilac tone of the mantle of God the Father dominates. The color is that of an iris tinged by silvery lunar reflections. The sky is gray and light blue-gray, always implying the color of the plaster. The second zone, with Prophets and Sibyls, is adorned with varied colors. However, Michelangelo kept the intensive colors subordinated. In the third zone, that of the lunettes and spandrels, iridescent changing colors are introduced more freely. With these fluctuations of the tones, Michelangelo succeeded in giving the general effect of the eternal change in the realm of nature.

The coloring on the whole purifies and softens the effect of the ensemble and takes away the heaviness of the single forms.

(2) Chiaroscuro

The same triple gradation is also visible in the treatment of chiaroscuro. In the histories, the chiaroscuro is very aerial; in the figures of the second zone, it is somewhat increased to model the twelve figures; in the third zone, it becomes of greatest importance. However, the shadows are never so strong as to confuse the clarity of the design. Strong light rays or deep masses of shadow are found in none of the paintings.

(3) Technique

The fresco, in which the artist must work piece by piece, is less subtle and elastic than the oil painting or water color. After making the sketches and preparing the cartoons, the artist has to choose that part of the composition which he thinks he can finish in one day, because the plaster, which is put on over the area, is not fresh enough to absorb the colors on the following day.

The colors for fresco painting are diluted in water and are applied in a liquid state on the plaster when it is still moist. The liquid colors are absorbed by this plaster and harden as it dries. Different shades of color are obtained by varying the amounts of water. Thick layers of colors are not possible because after setting they would break off. When the portion is finished, at the end of the day's work, the artist cuts away the plaster which exceeds

the outlines. The next day he begins his work immediately adjacent to this part. The artist cannot modify or "superpose" colors after they are once applied but he must destroy the complete portion if fresco is badly executed.¹

(4) Chronology

Scholars of the nineteenth century are agreed that Michelangelo began to paint his ceiling over the main entrance with the "Drunkenness of Noah." According to them he first painted all nine histories, one after the other, and then, having finished these, executed the nude youths with the medallions and the Prophets and Sibyls. The lunettes and the spandrels are the third phase of the development.

The histories show a progression of style. In his first three histories, the figures are small; the brush strokes carefully executed are small and close; perhaps Michelangelo did not realize at what distance the pictures must be viewed. But his latter histories are drawn with large and smooth brush strokes, without details, representing soft, round forms.

The question regarding the sequence of these fields is a much debated question. Powers states that the story begins at the West end of the chapel and unrolls to the

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., pp. 102-104.

East, thus giving it a theological sequence as found in Genesis.¹ Stearns agrees with this supposition.

However, if this be so, why did Michelangelo begin at the other end and work backwards? Another question may well be asked, as to why the "Sacrifice of Noah" precedes the "Deluge," if this is based on the account in Genesis.

De Tolnay heartily disagrees, stating that the sequence of the histories can only be understood on the basis of the philosophic conceptions of his time. He states that the story begins to unfold with the "Drunkenness of Noah" and moves forward, history by history, as the observer approaches the altar.

3. The "Last Judgment"

The great fresco, the "Last Judgment," measuring fifty-four feet six inches in height by forty-three feet eight inches in width, and begun in the sixtieth year of the artist, occupies the end wall-space above the altar in the Sistine Chapel. Symonds writes the following regarding its condition:

"Time, negligence, and outrage, the dust of centuries, the burned papers of successive conclaves, the smoke of altar-candles, the hammers and the hangings of upholsterers, the brush of breeches-maker and restorer, have so dealt with the 'Last Judgment' that it is almost impossible to do it justice now. What Michelangelo intended by his scheme of color is entirely lost . . .

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1. Powers, op. cit., pp. 81-100.



THE LAST JUDGMENT
MICHELANGELO

Nevertheless, in its composition the fresco may still be studied, and we are not unable to understand the enthusiasm which so nobly and profoundly planned a work of art aroused among contemporaries."¹

The figurative representation of the "Last Judgment" was as old as Italian art. Usually in the scene were painted the dead rising from their graves, the condemned driven into the abyss, the blessed rising to dance with the heavenly bands; and in the midst, above them all, Christ in judgment surrounded by His saints. The arrangement, according to the old custom, was that the good were on the left, the bad on the right, and in the midst, between them, at the feet of Christ, was the angel or angels of judgment; and above, the instruments of suffering were borne like trophies through the air.² Up to Michelangelo's time this scene was presented with great formality and crudeness.

Michelangelo followed this customary representation quite closely, but the "unpracticed eye" would find the grouping intricate and confusing. It is in reality a design of mathematical severity, divided into four bands, or planes of grouping. The pictorial divisions are horizontal in the main, though so combined and varied as to produce the effect of multiplied curves.³ The two upper planes will be studied first, after which the two lower

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1. Masters in Art, May, 1901, pp. 37-38.

2. Herman Grimm: Life of Michelangelo, Vol. II, p. 214.

3. Masters in Art, May, 1901, p. 38.

planes will be considered.

a. The Two Upper Planes

The pendentive upon which the prophet Jonah sits descends and breaks the surface at the top, leaving a semi-circular compartment on each side of its corbel. Michelangelo filled these upper spaces with two groups of wrestling angels, the one bearing a huge cross, the other angel bearing a column, the chief emblems of Christ's suffering. The crown of thorns is also there, the sponge, the ladder, and the nails. Symonds states that:

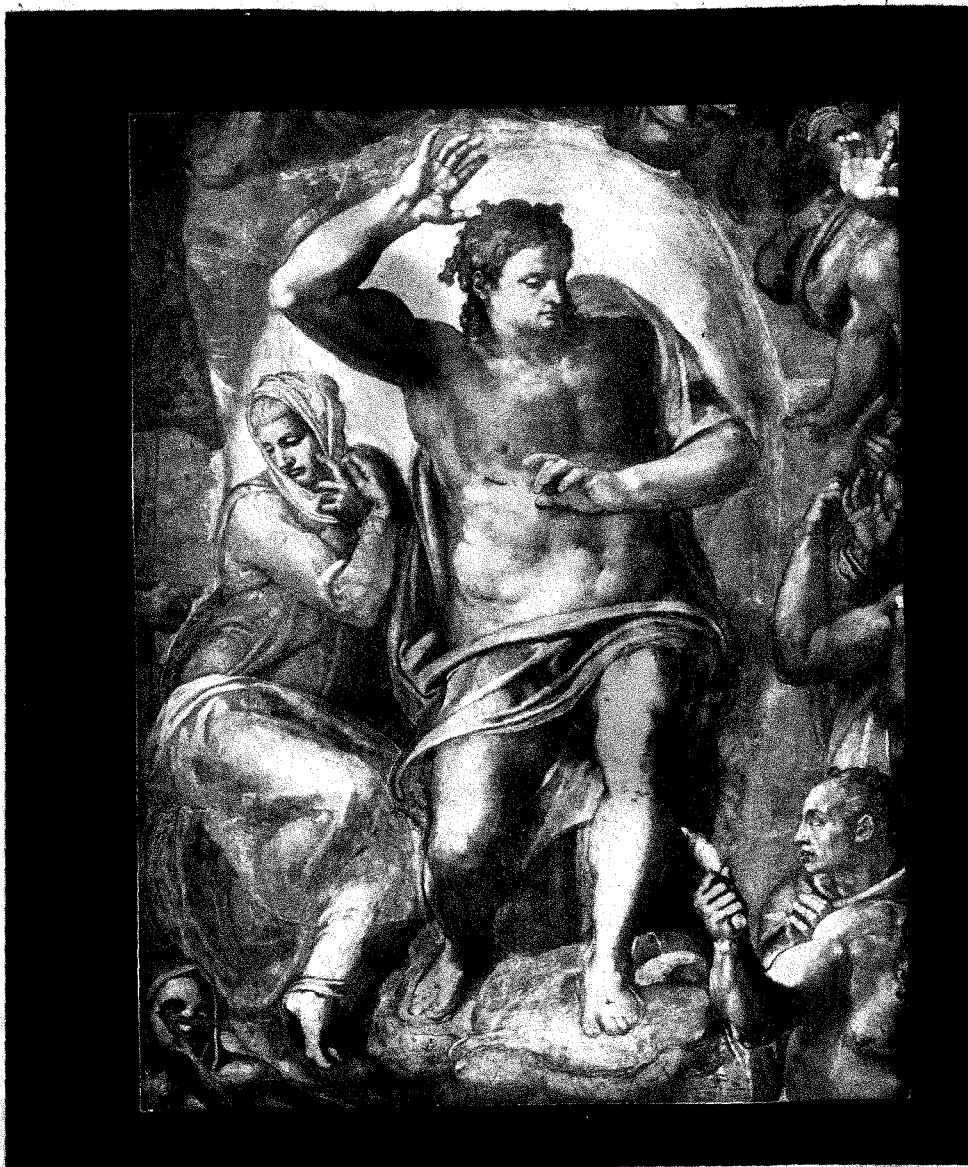
"It is with no merciful intent that these signs of our Lord's suffering are thus exhibited. Demonic angels, tumbling on clouds like Leviathans, hurl them to and fro in brutal wrath above the crowd of souls, as though to demonstrate the justice of damnation."¹

These two scenes make up the first plane.

The second plane is made up of saints on the right and left who surround Christ and the Virgin. They are arranged in four unequal groups of "subtle" and "surprising" intricacy. To the right is St. Sebastian with a fist full of arrows; St. Catherine with a section of a wheel, the instrument of her martyrdom; St. Simeon Gelotes with a saw; St. Peter with the key; St. Bartholomew with a fish in one hand, which is a symbol of Christ, and with his "flayed skin" in the other; St. Lawrence is to the left of Christ with a ladder, others interpret this man to represent one

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1. Masters in Art, May, 1901, p. 38.



CHRIST THE JUDGE
(DETAIL OF THE LAST JUDGMENT)

of the Roman soldiers. St. Christopher is on the left of Christ balancing St. Peter. St. John the evangelist and St. Paul are also represented here. In the left background, the light falls heavily on the figure of a woman. A little distance from her a wife is hastening to kiss her husband. Here is no tranquil scene of delight for the Blessed, yet one senses that these are the "pure in heart." Michelangelo exhibited not the enjoyment of happiness but the trembling expectation of speedily obtaining it. In this he proved himself a genius.¹

The principal figure of these two upper planes is Christ. Since the wall is half as high again as it is broad, Michelangelo has solved this by the use of a higher center for the two upper planes which is the judging Christ; and a lower center for the two lower planes, consisting of a group of angels sounding trumpets.

Immediately below the corbel, and well detached from the attendant saints, Christ rises from His throne. His face is turned in the direction of the damned, his right hand lifted as though loaded with thunderbolts. The Virgin sits in a cowering attitude at his right side, slightly "averting" her head, as though in painful expectation of the judgment to come.

Critics disagree regarding this representation of

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1. Grimm, op. cit., p. 215.

Christ as judge. Stearns states that "Christ vies in figure both with Hercules and Apollo." He finds Christ's muscular presentation magnificently conceived. He further describes Christ's "Napoleonic face" as having an expression in which all passion and suffering have been subdued to a majestic calmness--not the calmness of indifference but of eternal love.¹

H. H. Powers would choose to disagree. He states that the figure of Christ is unthinkable, His face is devoid of spiritual suggestion, and His gesture is without dignity or apparent relevancy. He further states that the Virgin appears in pure classic purity with no hint of tenderness or compassion. He states that it remains as puzzling as it is regrettable that Michelangelo's change in art in his latter years should have taken the form of "gross materialism, of physical heaviness and exaggeration."²

b. The Two Lower Planes

The two planes which have been described in the preceding section occupy the larger portion of the composition. The third in order is made up of three masses. To the left are souls ascending to be judged, some floating through "vague ether," wrapped with grave-clothes, others are assisted "by descending saints and angels, who reach

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1. Stearns, op. cit., p. 149.

2. Powers, op. cit., p. 178.

a hand, a rosary, to help the still gross spirit in its flight."¹ The very air seems to move upward in this portion of the painting. It is interesting to note that Michelangelo's angels have no wings.

The mass to the right stands in contrast to the scene on the left. Symonds describes it as follows:

"To the right are the condemned, sinking downwards to their place of torment, spurned by seraphs, cuffed by angelic grooms, dragged by demons, hurling, howling, huddled in a mass of horror. There is a wretch, twined round with fiends, gazing straight before him as he sinks; one-half of his face buried in his hand, the other fixed in a stony spasm of despair, foreshadowing perpetuity of hell."²

In the middle mass of this third plane floats a band of Titanic cherubs blowing their long trumpets over the earth and the sea to wake the dead. "Their attitudes," states Symonds, "compel our imagination to hear the crashing thunders of the trump of doom." Trumpets point in all directions except to the right. One of them is resounding in the ear of a sinner who is falling from above. Another one has his trumpet in a position ready to blow but turns his head to see the damned descend.

In the lower right, hell is depicted. The damned are slowly sinking into it. Michelangelo reverted to Dante³ for the symbolism chosen to portray hell. Charon, the

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1. Masters in Art, May, 1901, p. 38.
2. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
3. Stearns, op. cit., pp. 153-155.

demon, with "eyes of burning coal," and "lips of leather," beats the damned with his oar thus forcing them to get off the ferry-boat. The wicked are received by devils who drag them before Minos, the infernal judge. He is represented in the likeness of the unfortunate cardinal, Biagio da Cesena. A huge serpent coils about his figure. Dante's Inferno gives the following description of Minos:

"There Minos sits horrific, and grins; examines the crimes upon their entrance; judges and sends according as he gives himself. I say that when the ill-born spirit comes before him, it confesses all; and that sin-discerner sees what place in hell is for it, and with his tail makes as many circles round himself as the degrees he will have it to descend."¹

Nether regions "yawn infinitely deep beyond" in the extreme right end of the fresco. Michelangelo exhibited not the judgment itself but only the path to it. The tragedy lies not in the fearful deed, for the observer does not see the suffering of the individual, but he sees and feels the import of those last horrible moments before the soul sinks into eternal torment. Art critics agree that the scene is indescribable, the moment before the guilty spring down into flames and smoke.

Balancing hell, on the left hand of the observer is the "brute earth," the grave, out of which skeletons, bodies still veiled with palls and naked figures emerge, these not yet being condemned. Some are still half in the

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1. Cited from Grimm, op. cit., p. 220.

ground, others are crawling out of holes, still others are kneeling, staggering, their corpses slowly "thawing" into life eternal. Slowly they begin to rise, freed from the sleep of centuries--they rise up, up, until they surround the form of Christ and await their outcome.

c. The Four Planes as a Whole

All of the personages assembled for the last "assize" were originally represented wholly in the nude with the exception of the Virgin.¹ The opinion was widely held in Michelangelo's age that the figures were repelling. Aretino clearly insinuated that Michelangelo's nudes are not only inappropriate but indecent, that is, lewd, deliberately appealing to sex susceptibilities. Powers answers this accusation thus:

"It is possibly true that the nudity simply as such has its sex suggestion to the ordinary mind unless dominated by a powerful spiritual antidote, and in this sense the 'Last Judgment' may be open to criticism, but of conscious pandering to sex susceptibility there is nothing."²

Although Michelangelo was never a master of chiaroscuro,³ the picture is well lighted. The earth is represented by an irregular ledge as in the "Creation of Adam" from which light comes forth.

The multitude is characterized by enormous muscular and physical development. The personages fascinate and

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1. Powers, op. cit., p. 168.

2. Ibid., p. 171.

3. Stearns, op. cit., p. 143.

repel the observer at the same time as they are presented in all conceivable postures of rest and action, of foreshortening and suggested movement. Vasari evaluates the aim of the artist thus:

"It is obvious that the peerless painter did not aim at anything but the portrayal of the human body in perfect proportions and most varied attitudes, together with the passions and affections of the soul. That was enough for him, and here he has no equal. He wanted to exhibit the grand style, consummate draughtsmanship in the nude, mastery over all problems of design. He concentrated his powers on the human form, attending to that alone, and neglecting all subsidiary things, as charm of color, capricious inventions, delicate devices and novelties of fancy."¹

Other critics are very harsh in their evaluation of the "Last Judgment" feeling that these athletic nudes are simply "over-developed gymnasts," with almost total absence of spiritual significance. As the life of Michelangelo will be considered, it may become more evident why this painting is considered inferior to that of the ceiling.

The following statement must suffice for now:

"Partial and painful as we may find the meaning of the 'Last Judgment,' the meaning has been only too powerfully and personally felt. The denunciations of the prophets, the woes of the Apocalypse, the inventions of Savonarola, the tragedies of Italian history, the sense of present and indwelling sin, storm through and through it. Technically, the masterpiece bears signs of fatigue and discontent, in spite of its extraordinary vigor of conception and execution. The man was old and tired, thwarted in his wishes and oppressed with troubles. His very science had become more formal, his types more arid and schematic, than they used to be. The thrilling life,

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1. Masters in Art, May, 1901, p. 39.

the divine afflatus, of the Sistine vault have passed out of the 'Last Judgment.'¹

C. Religious Values Derived from Distinctive Characteristics of the Paintings

1. Change in Content and in Presentation

a. Development

Michelangelo did not limit himself to religious paintings as such. Especially in his earlier paintings before his contact with Savonarola, there is a strong Hellenistic element that influenced his choice of subjects. However, as years come and go, he turns to religious subjects primarily, in painting as well as in sculpture.

In his earlier presentation of the body, the forms are more normal in build as may be seen in the figures of the "Bathing Soldiers" or in the nudes of the "Holy Family." However, in the Sistine Chapel, his figures are no longer of this earth but gigantic, each turn and bend showing secret power. But in his later works, art critics feel that his genius, lacking in proper outlets, tended to stagnate, consequently he fell into exaggerations. Power turns into brutality; tactile values into "feats of modeling."²

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1. Masters in Art, May, 1901, pp. 39-40.

2. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

b. Meaning

No doubt Michelangelo's constant and continued interest and study of anatomy gave impetus to present the human frame in a more and more scientific way. But, as a study of his life will reveal, there was a greater motivating force that caused him to deviate in this fashion. His force was not material alone but spiritual as well. His soul, full of suppressed tenderness and righteous indignation, was questioning anxiously concerning the coming fate of Rome in the Sistine Ceiling, for he felt the spirit of his time. In the "Last Judgment," having seized that decisive moment at which Christ appears in judgment, the master caused each fibre of his complex composition to thrill with the tremendous passion of that coming sentence. Michelangelo saw the naked soul in its reality and only in the nude body, exaggerated in one way or another, could he express what he felt.

2. Values in Composition

a. Sensitivity in Color

In earlier paintings Michelangelo enjoyed using clear cool colors which gave the figures a "colored marble" impression. However, as he turned to the Sistine Ceiling, he colored the whole vault with dusky, tawny, bluish clouds of thunderstorms. The color scheme is measured, restrained, and perfectly fitting to the message upon his heart. There is no luxury of decorative art--no gold, no paint-box of vermilion or emerald green, writes Vasari, but the colors

are chosen for the subject. Especially is this seen in the histories where sin and its dire consequences are painted predominantly in gray, whereas representations of God the Father show an increase in silvery lunar reflections. The breast of God the Father in the last history is painted with great tenderness expressed in soft gray-lilac tones shading into a pale blue. The Prophets, Sibyls and other figures bring out Michelangelo's great sensitivity to color in relation to what he is undertaking to represent.

b. Severity in Line and Shape

The diagonal line is Michelangelo's favorite straight line. He uses long curved lines to soften the effect. Sharp angles are used but more often the right angle. The Christ in the "Last Judgment" holds his arms in right angular positions. Especially the adolescent nudes portray the artist's great love for angles. Severity is not only seen in the lines of form but in facial expressions. The nose, the mouth, the chin, the forehead are made in sharp lines with sharp angles. A superficial acquaintance with them may repel the observer, but after a prolonged study of them, these severe lines take on character, even mellowness and tenderness.

c. Tactility in Value and Mass

Michelangelo never concerned himself greatly with the problem of light and shade. His sole purpose in its use

was to bring out more strongly the plasticity and tactile effects of his figures. This is seen in the "Holy Family," where the arms of the Madonna stand out like those of a statue. Likewise in the ceiling there is no one source of lighting. In the "Last Judgment," subdued light comes up from the crust of the earth, but it does not necessarily affect the lighting of the entire picture. Michelangelo made light where he needed it to bring out the relief of his figures, so that he might thereby transfer the message he sought to paint.

d. Subtlety in Treatment of Form

For Michelangelo, the nude and art were synonymous. H. Taine states that the twenty youthful figures seated on the cornices of the Sistine Ceiling surpass all of Michelangelo's figures in painting. They as well as all of Michelangelo's figures hold certain things in common. They have a small head, a huge thorax, the tendency to turn the latter to one side, while the legs, reversing the movement, are turned to the other, the pelvis becoming the pivot, and the abdominal and stomach muscles especially showing the science of the artist. The hips are narrow, the thighs powerful. In his seated figures, he liked to foreshorten the legs from the knees down till they seem almost to lose themselves in the pose and shadow. There is subtlety in the representation of the "Holy Family" in the handing over the child from one to another. Again, in the "Creation of

Adam," God the Father's minimum effort and immense effect are subtly expressed. Again in the "Last Judgment," Michelangelo has with great skill portrayed the upward and the downward moving bodies and the on-coming movement of the Christ. His Prophets and Sibyls likewise show exerting tension in the rigidity of their muscles and posture or sorrow in their weary and relaxed limbs.

e. Complexity in Composition

In composition, Michelangelo differed greatly from his great rival, Raphael. Raphael's relations with all people were harmonious, so likewise in his pictures each figure is harmoniously related to every other. For Michelangelo, it was difficult to bring his figures to accord with one another. In the "Last Judgment," his groups are so many masses arranged symmetrically, one group balancing another as a mass, but each figure in the mass seems to be autonomous and sufficient in itself. Again in the Ceiling, the composition may be characterized by harmony, rhythm, symmetry and balance, but there is no inter-relation between the stark glances of the Sibyls and the statue-like postures of the Prophets and the straining gestures of the nude youths. The representation is complex. There are a thousand little independent worlds subject only to themselves, yet unconsciously the observer feels their artistic arrangement.

3. Values in Subject

Instead of going into the glorified traditions and canons of the Church, Michelangelo goes back into Hebrew history, there to find the saints he wishes to represent. Scenes of despair, of heroism, of active combat, of revenge; in brief, scenes of life as life really was according to the account in the Scriptures. However, he did not limit himself by the accounts as may be seen in the "Creation of Adam," but his imagination carried the concepts expressed in them to fuller expression and reality.

Another great source for his inspiration which added value to his interpretation of religion came from literature. Homer's conflicts are seen in the adolescent nudes; Dante's description of hell is seen in the "Last Judgment;" Petrarch, Lactentius, Virgil, and others sharpened his imagination. He with his brushes embraced that which these men transferred into poetry and prose.

Hellenistic art, especially Greek sculpture, gave Michelangelo great resources for presenting his religious paintings. Profiles, gestures, postures, stem back directly to antique representations. Hellenistic philosophy likewise influenced Michelangelo's paintings.

4. Values in Treatment

In technical achievement of Michelangelo nothing has made his work more fascinating, more personal, than the

application of sculptural qualities in his paintings. Again and again he was overcome by an inward compulsion that made him want to do work in marble more than anything else in the world. But as this was denied to him, he instead brought over the qualities of sculpture, such as isolation, relief, self-contained statue-like character, into his personages in the Sistine Chapel,¹ thus giving impetus to his spiritual message.

5. Values in the Impression of the Whole

Powers states that "the nude figure is the subtlest vehicle of spiritual expression known to art. There is no limit to its range of suggestion in the hands of the master."² Changes too subtle for definition may shift the emphasis from passivity to assertion; from joy to sorrow, and so through a thousand moods. It is in the expression of these moods that art finds its harmonies and discords. Although there is no monotonous uniformity, yet all the characters of the ceiling sing in tune.

To the writer these figures speak of anxious waiting, of thwarted plans, of questions that cannot be answered now; they speak of the futility of life, of fear and dread, of tension, of labor, of drudgery, of injustice. They further speak of the terrible consequences of sin, of judgment, of

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1. Masters in Art, May, 1901, p. 31.

2. Powers, op. cit., p. 143.

vengeance, of loneliness, of pain, of wistfulness, of extreme sensitivity.

They speak of beauty--beauty and perfection in moral and spiritual realms; of power--tremendous power; they speak of expectation, suspense, as the future lies unveiled.

They speak of a Creator-God, a wonderful and terrible Being, they speak of the possibility of the inner renewing of the human soul. They speak of a Messiah, and his way of life. Finally they speak of the majestic appearance of One who will bring harmony into all of life.

D. Summary

In the selection of religious paintings of Michelangelo, one of his Madonnas has been chosen for study and the paintings in the Sistine Chapel. After a brief study of the architecture of the Chapel, it became evident that only a genius could use it to such an advantage as Michelangelo did. A general study was made of the paintings and a special study followed of a history, a Prophet, and a Sibyl. It was noted in the study that at the time Michelangelo began to express spiritual thoughts, his departure from naturalistic perfection began. In the composition there was found sensitivity to color, severity in line and shape, tactility in value and mass, subtlety in treatment of form, and complexity in composition. It was further found that the Old Testament gave rise to many subjects

which were intensified by imagination stimulated by literature. Actual Hellenistic likeness of ancient times were found in some of Michelangelo's personages. The value in treatment consisted of the sculpture-like qualities he introduced into painting. The value of the impression of the whole was found to be in his use of the nude and its susceptibility for expressing superbly the physical, mental, and spiritual experiences of humanity.

CHAPTER III

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE TIMES AND LIFE OF FRA ANGELICO

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A. Introduction

In seeking to arrive at a more intelligent appreciation of this or that artist's achievement, it is of primary importance to obtain some accurate knowledge of the purely artistic influences of his youth. However, in reconstructing an artist's personality, all the influences that helped to make him what he was must be taken into account also. It is especially important to do this in the case of a Florentine painter of the fourteenth century. "For the Florentines," states Langton Douglas, "were so much more than artists. They were powerfully affected in their art, as in other things, by the religious and philosophical movements of their time."¹ In this chapter then a study will be made not only of the life and character of Fra Angelico, but also the outside influences which had a part in his development and in the making of his pictures.

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1. Douglas, op. cit., p. 21.

B. The Times of Fra Angelico

1. Artistic Influences

There were in the early years of the fifteenth century, three great centers of artistic life in Florence.

First is the botteghe of the pupils of Giotto; secondly, the schools of the miniaturists; and thirdly, the group of young sculptors, as Jacopo della Quercia and Ghiberti, Brunelleschi and Donatello, who were destined to fashion the most perfect art-works of the fourteenth century. By all of these Fra Angelico was influenced.

In the first two periods, he was largely influenced by Giottoesques and miniaturists as is evidenced in his use of rich, harmonious colors, in his treatment of draperies and faces, in the almost total absence of relief, and in his meticulousness. But gradually he became more and more identified with the new movement in art which begins with the sculptors and architects, and had for its first pioneer in painting the great Masaccio. "Fra Angelico," says Langton Douglas, "soon became an enthusiast about the new movement. The story of his fruitful admiration of great artists like Brunelleschi and Michelozzo is written in his works."¹ He further states that, "Under the guidance of Masaccio and the sculptors he studied that which of all nature's products is the most important--the human body."²

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1. Ibid., p. 20.

2. Ibid., p. 44.

Fra Angelico shows himself a true child of the Renaissance in his curiosity about the natural world--but much more does he show it in his attitude toward man, in his recognition of personality, in his realization of individual character. The Renaissance not only gave the widest opportunities for the development of individuality, but also led the individual to the most zealous study of himself and others. The progress and results of this study are to be seen not only in the biographies of the time and in the works of Italian novelists, but also in the rise and development of the portrait art. In this great movement Angelico was one of the pioneers, for what Donatello first sought to express in sculpture and Vittore Pisano by the art of the medallist, Fra Angelico and Masaccio endeavored to give utterance to through the medium of an art which is more fitted than any other "for complete and simultaneous¹ presentation of personality."

Angelico was also an eager student of the antique and keenly interested in the new movement in architecture. He was alert to profit by it for it is written of him that:

"The newly revived classical forms--the Ionic Capital, the festoons with which Michelozzo adorned his friezes, the medallions copied by Brunelleschi from the temple of Vesta at Tivoli, and many more beside--found a place in his paintings almost simultaneously with their appearance in the sister art."²

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1. Ibid., pp. 144-146.

2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, pp. 29-30.

However, Angelico never forgot his true role. He never allowed himself to be deviated from his own true course by some masterful personality. Born nine years before Andrea del Castagno, ten years before Paolo Uccello, thirteen years before Domenico Veneziano, and fourteen years before Masaccio, he and Masolino were the oldest pioneers of the new movement in painting. He was always eager to acquire new knowledge, but when acquired it had to be thoroughly "assimilated" before being used. Langton Douglas states:

"It must pass through the alembic of the master's potent idiosyncrasy. Even when most strongly under the influence of others, as for example, in his later years, when he owed so much to Michelozzo and Masaccio, he was never content merely to reproduce what he had gained from them. Early in his career, he found himself; and no artist was ever more true to his own temperament. Artistically, at least, he dared to live his own life, and his works, too, reveal that in other things he was no respecter of persons."¹

2. Philosophical Influences

In Angelico's early youth, Florence became the center of the humanist movement. Douglas characterizes the trend of the time thus:

"Under the patronage of men like Pella Strozzi, adherents flocked to it day by day. Audiences crowded about Manuel Chrysoloras, lecturing on Greek. Niccolo' Niccoli sent his emissaries over land and sea in search of manuscripts. The flower of Florentine youth became eager about classical literature. The tendency of the movement was 'the emancipation of the individual from the tyranny of outward

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1. Douglas, op. cit., p. 17.

systems' even though this was unrealized by the first promoters for the great majority were in no way hostile to the Catholic Church."¹

However, the tendency to imitate pagan vices infiltrated into the life of the Church and gave earnest men cause
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 for serious alarm.

3. Religious Influences

a. Dominici

Giovanni Dominici, the great Dominican preacher and scholar, was one of the first to sound a note of warning against the rising tide of humanism. He was in sympathy with art and culture; he was no mere fervid revivalist but sensitive to the claims of reason and intellect. One of his hearers states that he had never been stirred by eloquence so great. He further says: "The friar spoke of the Incarnation in such a manner as to pierce asunder soul and body, and to compel all men to follow after him."³
 He drew many young men to him who remained faithful to the principles he inspired in them, one of such being that "eminently rational" saint, S. Antonino.

b. Papacy

Trouble arose in Rome regarding the Papal throne.

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1. Ibid., pp. 21-22.
2. For further information on the philosophical trends during this century, the reader is referred to: Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, pp. 336-343.
3. Douglas, op. cit., p. 22.

The re-establishment of the Papacy had taken place in 1377 after the transfer to Avignon. However, another schism set in at the turn of the century which resulted in three popes laying claim to the papal throne. Four reformatory councils were called: the council of Pisa in 1409, Constance in 1414, Basel in 1431, and Ferrara-Florence in 1438. After the council of Pisa, the Dominicans of Florence had to flee to Cortona. During this exile, Fra Angelico had very close associations with S. Antonino who strengthened and confirmed Fra Angelico's tendencies toward a religious life.

By the time Nicolus V came into office, the surge of unrest came to a halt. Pope Nicolus had great influence in promoting the spirit of the Renaissance for he was an intelligent and "genial patron" of letters and arts. He called scholars and artists into his court and transformed the "eternal city" from a spectacle of ruins to a capital adorned¹ with works of art and architectural constructions.

The Church at this time was the paymaster of all artistic creations. Either an artist painted religious subjects or else he painted a subject not religious but gave it a religious title. Fra Angelico was not driven to any such "shifts" as the latter. Pictures with religious subjects were required of him and religious subjects were

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1. Philip Schaff: History of the Christian Church, Vol. VI, pp. 406-407.

those he was most longing to paint. Many art critics feel that this is the greatest secret of his success for an artist always does best what he wants to do, what he can scarcely help doing, not what he is forced to do by his paymasters.

C. The Life of Fra Angelico

1. Birth and childhood

Fra Angelico was born in 1387 in a tiny hamlet, Vicchio, among the sun-crowned Apennines, not far from the spot where the immortal Giotto first saw the light. Vicchio is located in the broad and fertile valley of the Mugello, Italy, not far from Florence. His father Pietro gave the child the name of Guido da Vicchio. Beyond the years and place of his birth and his father's baptismal name, nothing is known with certainty.

It is probable that his youth was spent in some artist's studio or workshop in Florence, for Vasari states that while still very young he was perfectly acquainted with the practice of his art. Nothing definite, however, is known concerning the young Guido's artistic training. Vasari is silent on the subject.

2. Young manhood

It is probable that Guido would have been content to follow the profession of the painter for the rest of his life had it not been for the teachings of the great

Dominican preacher and scholar, Giovanni Dominici. Dominici traveled from one end of Italy to the other, attempting to counteract the humanistic pursuit of classical culture which was already beguiling monks into the tendency of imitating pagan vices. This he did by establishing houses of the Dominican Order of monks which should be conducted under more rigid rules. His "eloquence" inspired many young men to follow his footsteps; and among those who sought admission to the reformed order were Guido and his brother Benedetto. They together in the year 1407 entered the convent on the lower slopes of the hill of Fiesole just outside of Florence.

In 1409, because of tempestuous times in Rome, the brotherhood was forced to flee to Foligno; but after spending several years there, they were compelled to leave for Cortona because of a pestilence. After the schism in the Church had been healed, they returned to their former residence in Fiesole.

3. Middle Age

From 1418 to 1435, Angelico lived in the convent of his order at Fiesole. The Dominican Order did work both in painting and architecture; and while in this peaceful retreat, the monk worked with untiring industry at his art, painting many pictures not only for his own convent, but for other religious houses, and for churches, guilds, and private individuals.

Early in the year of 1436, the brothers of the Dominico left Fiesole and moved into Florence. With elaborate ceremony they made a solemn entry into the city and took up their residence at the convent of San Marco, which, through the intercession of Cosimo de' Medici, had been placed at their disposal. However, owing to the dilapidated condition of the building, many suffered because of the severity of the weather and the lack of proper accommodations, and some died. After some time, in response to an appeal from the pope on their behalf, Cosimo de' Medici came to their assistance. He ordered his favorite architect, Michelozzo, to erect new and comfortable buildings.

Of these buildings, the convent in particular became a treasure house of Angelico's works. Over forty cells were decorated with scenes from the life of Christ intending thus to assist the meditations of the monks. The great "Crucifixion" which he painted in the chapter house is the largest and one of his most important achievements. While some, skilled in the art of illuminating choir-books and missals, devoted themselves to that work, and while others, being sent out "to edify the holy and convince the sinner" took part in evangelistic work, Angelico, not by power of words but by setting before his brethren scenes from the Gospel story fixed their thoughts upon things heavenly.

4. Latter Years and Death

The first mention of the artist at work in Rome is made in 1447. Pope Eugenius IV who had summoned him to decorate the walls of a chapel adjoining St. Peters, died a few weeks before Angelico's arrival. Pope Nicolus V who had succeeded the papal chair, and who was desirous of carrying out the plans of his predecessor, persuaded Angelico to proceed with the work. After spending a summer in Orvieto, Angelico, now being sixty years old, entered upon what may be regarded as the crowning achievement of his life--the decoration of the little Chapel of Nicolus V, in the Vatican. On these walls he painted his famous frescos representing scenes from the lives of St. Lawrence and St. Stephen.

In 1449, Angelico returned to Fiesole, having been elected prior of the Monastery of San Dominico. It is not known just when he returned to Rome, but in 1455, when he was sixty-eight years old, he died in Rome, in the great convent of his order, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. His earthly remains were placed close to those of Saint Catherine of Siena, another Dominican saint. "She too," states Cheney, "had found God in the mystic way and had served man and her church immortally. It is fitting that the two foremost Tuscan mystics should lie forever under one roof."¹

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1. Cheney, op. cit., p. 231.

Between the two graves rises the statue of Christ. This statue is the work of Fra Angelico's great "countryman,"¹ Michelangelo.

At the command of Pope Niccolus V, his effigy was carved in marble upon his tomb. The following epitaph was composed by the Pope himself in the Latin.

"Give me not praise for being almost a second Apelles,
 But because I gave to thy poor, O Christ, all my
 earnings.
 Thus part of my work remains on earth and part in
 heaven.
 That city which is the flower of Etruria, bore me,
 Giovanni."²

D. Distinctive Characteristics of Fra Angelico

1. The Artist-Saint

"Fra Angelico," states Douglas, "carried about in one body two temperaments, which are usually supposed to have but little in common, and which are seldom found inhabiting the same frame--namely the saintly and artistic."³ He was primarily an artist, but an artist who happened to be a saint.

Giorgio Vasari, who had intimate friends at the convent and who was informed of Angelico's life by the brethren,⁴ writes the following regarding Angelico:

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1. The Work of Fra Angelico Da Fiesole Reproduced in Three Hundred and Twenty-seven Illustrations, p. 229.
2. Masters in Art, February, 1903, pp. 65-68.
3. Douglas, op. cit., p. 4.
4. Since Vasari's statement regarding Angelico's life is quoted by most biographers, his quotation will be used here.

"Fra Giovanni was kindly to all, and moderate in all his habits, living temperately, and holding himself entirely apart from the snares of the world. He used frequently to say that he who practiced the art of painting had need of quiet, and should live without cares or anxious thoughts; adding that he who would do the work of Christ should perpetually remain with Christ . . . in his painting he gave evidence of piety and devotion as well as of ability, and the saints that he painted have more of the air and expression of sanctity than have those of any other master.

"It was the custom of Fra Giovanni to abstain from retouching or improving any painting once finished. He altered nothing, but left all as it was done the first time, believing, as he said, that such was the will of God. It is also affirmed that he would never take the pencil in hand until he had first offered a prayer. He is said never to have painted a Crucifix without tears streaming from his eyes; and in the countenances and attitudes of his figures it is easy to perceive proof of his sincerity, his goodness, and the depth of his devotion to the religion of Christ."¹

2. The Monk

Not only was "the splendor of the eternal day" released by his brush but also through his daily life and relationships these heavenly qualities were present. Vasari states that he "was never seen to display anger among the brethren of his order." Vasari feels that this is most extraordinary, almost incredible. He further states that when Angelico admonished his brethren it was with gentleness and a quiet smile. All of his brethren testified to his goodness, his humility and quiet charm of manner.

Angelico was a man of "utmost simplicity of intention."

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1. Masters in Art, February, 1903, pp. 26-27.

It is said of him that being invited to breakfast by Pope Nicolus V, he had "scruples of conscience" regarding the fact that he was eating meat without the consent or permission of the prior, not considering that the Pontiff stood in authority above the prior. Vasari gives this further information regarding his personal life:

"He disregarded all earthly advantages, and living in pure holiness, was as much the friend of the poor in life as I believe his soul now is in heaven. He labored continually at his paintings, but would do nothing that was not connected with things holy. He might have been rich, but of riches he took no care; on the contrary, he was accustomed to say that the only true riches was contentment with little. He might have commanded many, but would not do so, declaring that there was less fatigue and less danger of error in obeying others than in commanding others. It was at his option to hold places of dignity in the brotherhood of his order, and also in the world; but he regarded them not, affirming that he sought no dignity and took no care but that of escaping hell and drawing near to Paradise."¹

E. Summary

Although little is known of Angelico's childhood years, the years of his early manhood and those that follow have been carefully recorded whereby a minimum of information can be gathered. Before noting the facts about Fra Angelico's life the artistic, philosophical, and religious influences were considered. It was found that the sculptors and painters of his time had a great influence upon his art yet they never robbed him of his own "peculiar touch." The

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1. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

influx of humanism and the stringent times in Rome gave rise to Dominico's campaign which also left its imprint on the soul of the young Angelico. The distinctive characteristics of Fra Angelico were found to be genuine piety, great love for his brethren and for the poor. As a painter it was found that each stroke of his brush was accompanied with prayer and each crucifix painted filled his soul with grief. Thus his saintly life is very evident as an artist and as a monk.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE TIMES AND LIFE OF MICHELANGELO

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THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE TIMES AND LIFE OF MICHELANGELO

A. Introduction

Letters of Michelangelo, written to his father and brothers and close relatives, have been preserved through these many years. In these he shows a great interest in political affairs and a deep concern in the welfare of his family, but he never mentions detailed information regarding his artistic work. In his latter years, his religious sentiments are expressed in his poems and sonnets, some of which are addressed to his one love, Vittoria Colonna. These writings, as well as records which were penned by his contemporaries, hold much fascinating and valuable information regarding his personal life and conduct.

B. The Times of Michelangelo

1. Artistic Influences

Giotto and Masaccio had a distinctive influence on the art of Michelangelo, for while artists in Ghirlandajo's school were copying figures of contemporary artists, which was contemptible art, Michelangelo painted figures of these two men. However, the relationship of body and drapery as cause and effect, which Giotto and Masaccio barely indicated,

became the focal point of Michelangelo's studies.¹ This study carried Michelangelo back to Greek sculpture, he becoming the first person since antiquity to comprehend fully the identity of the nude with great figure art.² Furthermore, he adapts the drapery not to the static figure but to the figure in motion. De Tolnay characterizes Michelangelo's art thus:

"We see that Michelangelo looked upon the art of antiquity not as the historical remains of a past age, as did those (Ghirlandajo) who studied them from an archaeological point of view; nor did he consider antiquity as the dream of a golden age, a distant Utopia, as did others (Botticelli) who drew their inspiration from ancient literature. Ancient works of art were for him an expression of the eternal essence of life. When he gives to his works or drawings a classical character, it is to set them apart in time and space."³

At the time Michelangelo began to produce artistic works in Florence, the city was dominated by the artistic taste of Leonardo. However, in the artistic rivalry between these two which soon existed, the powerful and rugged style of Michelangelo took precedence over Leonardo's sweet ideal of beauty. To this Florence, divided by these two artists, came Raphael in 1504. He apparently sought to harmonize the irreconcilable concepts of art as found in the two rivals by popularizing their ideas.⁴ Michelangelo kept apart from either of these two men as long as they lived.

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., pp. 71-72.
2. Masters in Art, May, 1901, p. 26.
3. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 71.
4. Ibid., p. 30.

2. Philosophic Influences

Italy was under the influence of Neo-Platonism when Michelangelo was a youth. Florence, one of the leading centers of humanism, was enjoying the company of great thinkers. The Court of Lorenzo de Medici was frequented by men such as Cristoforo Landino, commentator of Virgil's Aeneid and of Dante's Divina Commedia; Ficino,¹ philosopher and theologian, translator and commentator of Plato; Proclus and Porphyrius, and the author of the Theologia Platonica from which came the idea of the deification of man by his own force; Girolamo Benivieni, the poet of Platonic love; and Pico della Mirandola, humanist and follower of Plato and Aristotle.

De Tolnay states that Michelangelo was deeply indebted to these philosophers in these lines:

"To them he owes his concept of esthetics, which is based on the adoration of earthly beauty as the reflection of the divine idea; his ethics, which rests upon the recognition of the dignity of mankind as the crown of creation; his religious concept which considers paganism and Christianity as merely eternally different manifestations of the truth."²

Some writers feel that Michelangelo's life was to follow the typical course of the lives of men about Lorenzo de Medici. They state that his Platonic love for Vittoria Colonna was like the love of Lorenzo for Simonetta, which

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1. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 21.

2. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 18.

itself was nothing but a repetition of Dante's love for Beatrice and Petrarch's love for Laura. They further imply that Michelangelo's late conversion to Christianity as the final redeeming truth was a result or at least was foreshadowed by the late conversions of Lorenzo, Poliziano,¹ Ficino, and Pico.

3. Religious Influences

a. Savonarola

As pagan philosophy had thoroughly led the Church into a new direction, Jerome Savonarola, Italy's greatest preacher, came to the front. He was born in 1452 in Ferrara. He fled to a monastery at twenty-three years of age and shortly thereafter began to preach. In fiery popular sermons he castigated the morals of his time. These lines are taken from one of his sermons:

"Go thither to see Rome. Thou shalt find them all with the books of the Humanities in their hands and telling one another that they can guide men's souls by means of Virgil, Horace and Cicero . . . Arise, and come to deliver Thy Church from the hands of devils, from the hands of tyrants, from the hands of iniquitous prelates."²

He uttered prophecies, one of which, the invasion of Charles VIII of France, made such an impression when fulfilled that he was able to set up a theocratic government in Florence and bring about a spectacular reform in outward

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1. Ibid., p. 19.

2. Schaff, op. cit., p. 688.

morals. A reaction set in. He was excommunicated by the pope, captured by a fanatical mob, and condemned to be burned at the stake. During intervals between his torture, Savonarola composed his Meditations upon the two penitential Psalms, the Thirty-second and the Fifty-first. Here one may see the "gloss" of his warm religious nature as the great preacher approaches the throne of grace as a needy sinner.

It is not known to just ~~what~~ an extent Michelangelo abandoned himself to these feelings, but he certainly belonged to Savonarola's adherents. In Michelangelo's declining years he still studied his writings and remembered the strong voice in which he preached.

b. Papacy

Rome at this time was the seat of all iniquity. Savonarola states that every Roman priest had his concubine; prelates and priests were chained to the earth and loved earthly things. The care of souls was no longer their concern--they preached to please princes.

Michelangelo felt the wickedness of the Church keenly, as his letters to his father show. His life is characterized by four flights because of his trouble with the self-seeking popes. He lived and worked under five popes, four of whom sought to drain his very life from him. If Michelangelo had not feared the outcome of disobedience to the popes in the life to come, he would have never permitted them to misuse him as they did.

C. The Life of Michelangelo

1. Birth and Childhood

On March 6, 1475, Lodovico Buonarroiti wrote the following line in his family book. "I recall that today, this sixth of March, 1475, there was born to me a male child; I named him Michelangelo . . ." The place of his birth was in the little town of Caprese in Tuscany. Several weeks after his birth he was given over to a nurse in Florence who was the wife of a stonecutter and also the daughter of a stonecutter. In later years Michelangelo is said to have told Vasari: "Giorgio, . . . along with the milk of my nurse I received the knack of handling chisel and hammer." It is supposed that Michelangelo's mother was in poor health during his childhood.

Michelangelo's ancestry was honorable, his father claiming ancestry from the princely house of Canossa. Because of Lodovico's family pride, Michelangelo was placed in a grammar school at the age of ten to study letters, but the child, showing no interest, preferred instead to go into the churches to copy paintings. The father, being displeased by his son's artistic interest, seeing no difference, as Condivi states it, "between a sculptor and a stonecutter," often maltreated the child by strenuously beating him. The father's disdain for his son's artistic career is understandable as one becomes familiar with the social position of the Florentine artists at the end of the fifteenth

century.

Michelangelo was the second of five sons of Lodovico's first wife of whom nothing is known. Because the oldest brother was in the priesthood, Michelangelo was considered the oldest and always felt somewhat superior to his younger brothers. The members of the Buonarroti Simoni family had been for the most part money-changers and traders. The financial status of Michelangelo's father was very moderate, for Lodovico's insight into financial matters indicated¹ carelessness and neglect.

2. Young Manhood

A turning point came in Michelangelo's life when he freed himself from the ties of his family and followed the voice of "creative genius" rather than ancestral tradition. He entered the apprenticeship in the studio of the painter, Ghirlandajo. The master does not seem to have had a deep influence on young Michelangelo who was already too independent to imitate Ghirlandajo, but instead, corrected his master's drawings on one occasion. The relationship between the master and his pupil was not a happy one. During this time he took great interest in the study of anatomy and perspective.

After leaving Ghirlandajo's bottega, Michelangelo

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1. Ibid., pp. 3-12.

often visited the Lorenzo de Medici's collection of antiques in the gardens of San Marco. He was now sixteen years of age. Vasari states that figures, pictures, and drawings such as those in the gardens were to be found nowhere in Italy or outside--works of Donatello, Brunelleschi, Massacio, Paolo, Ucello, Fra Angelico, and Fra Filippo. Here the youth discovered his vocation. He struck out a Faun's mask from marble which prompted Lorenzo to take the lad into his own household. In Lorenzo's palace, Michelangelo's real education began. He sat at the same table with men like Ficino, Pico and Poliziano drinking in the "golden poetry" of Greece and listening to the dialogues of Plato. Grimm states the following regarding these years:

"Thus Michelangelo, at that age in which the pliant mind of man is capable of the deepest and richest impressions, received an education which could scarcely have been acquired at a more fortunate period."¹

Michelangelo's prestige grew rapidly in the eyes of his patron. Michelangelo seems to have done no merely "prentice work," for not a fragment of his work was insignificant. Symonds states that "into art, as into a rich land, he came and conquered . . ."²

It was in the year that Michelangelo was admitted into the Medici palace that Savonarola came to Florence, being

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1. Grimm, op. cit., p. 115.

2. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 21.

thirty-seven years old. Savonarola saw heathenish doings everywhere, the pope and the cardinals being at the head. The conduct of the Carmelite monk, Filippo Lippi, Masaccio's best pupil, with Lucretia Buti, his model, is only one example which shows how men lived and thought.¹ Savonarola's one theme was chastisement which was immediately to overtake Rome and Italy. He drew over to himself Lorenzo's own party. It was during the Lenten Season of 1492, that a spiritual awakening took hold of Florence, resulting from Savonarola's "campaigns." Women rose up suddenly, laid aside their splendid garments and dressed again in modest attire; enemies became reconciled; illegal gain was voluntarily given back. Following these days, Lorenzo suddenly became ill and died at the age of forty-four. Savonarola visited him before his death.

Lorenzo's reign had been that of a despot. Upon the succession of Piero, a new republic was set up and it was dangerous for the tyrant's housefriends to be seen in the city. Michelangelo fled to Bologna where he studied Dante and made an angel of marble. On his return to Florence, he made the statue, the "Sleeping Cupid," and, after giving it a weather-worn and ancient appearance, sold it as an antique to a cardinal in Rome.

The dispute about the price of this "Cupid" took

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1. Grimm, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

Michelangelo to Rome in 1496, at the age of twenty-one.

Symonds writes that, "here, while the Borgias were turning the Vatican into a den of thieves and harlots, he executed the purest of all his statues, a Pietà in marble."¹

He returned to Florence from 1501 to 1505 where he made his great statue of "David," painted the "Holy Family," and made the cartoon of the "Bathing Soldiers." No man's name, not even Leonardo's, stood in higher esteem from this time forward, but it was not his "David" but the cartoon, representing a crowd of nude men in every posture indicating haste, anxiety and struggle that won the admiration of artists and the public.²

Pope Julius, in 1505, ordered Michelangelo to Rome to prepare his mausoleum. Upon this request, Michelangelo spent eight months among the stone-quarries of Carrara selecting marble for the Pope's tomb. When he returned, he found the Pope's mind poisoned against him by his enemies. After seeking admission to the Pope for six successive days, and on the last day being denied entrance with such rudeness, he hurried home, sold his household goods and fled to Florence. The Pope sent several couriers to bring Michelangelo back to Rome and finally in person met him in Bologna, anxiously seeking to recover what had been lost

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1. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 22.
2. Grimm, op. cit., pp. 90-120.

so lightly. Reconciliation between the Pope and Michelangelo took place in November, 1506, Michelangelo having to beg pardon "with a rope about his neck." Straightway, he was ordered to cast a bronze statue of Julius. Symonds describes Michelangelo's sentiments thus:

"Julius' tomb, as Michelangelo conceived it, would have been the most stupendous monument of sculpture in the world. Of this gigantic scheme only one imperfect drawing now remains. The 'Moses' and the 'Bound Captives' are all that Michelangelo accomplished. For forty years the 'Moses' remained in his workshop. For forty years he cherished a hope that his plan might still in part be executed, complaining the while that it would have been better for him to have made sulphur matches all his life than to have taken up the desolating artist's trade. 'Every day,' he cries, 'I am stoned as though I had crucified Christ. My youth has been lost, bound hand and foot to this tomb.'"¹

3. Middle Age

Michelangelo was thirty-three years of age as he left for Rome to begin the Sistine Ceiling. His enemies had told Julius that it was an ill-omen for a man to build his own sepulchre and that Michelangelo's talent should be set at work in the Chapel. In vain Michelangelo pleaded that he was no painter; in vain he reminded the Pope of the wasted time and effort in Carrara. In 1508, the cartoons for the ceiling were finished and that fall he began to paint and at the end of four years, the whole was completed.

Violent scenes took place between the Pope and Michel-

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1. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 24.

angelo. Once the Pope struck him with his cane; at another occasion, the Pope threatened that he would hurl him off the scaffold. In the Papal Court, Michelangelo was looked upon as a mere artisan, not as a great artist.

It is characteristic of the artist's religious feeling at this time that he had requested Fra Lorenzo, a Florentine Dominican friar, to pray and fast for him. The artist frequently requested such prayers. In a letter of May 26, 1507, he asked his father to have prayers said for the success of his bronze-pouring. In November of that year he wrote, "I believe someone's prayers have helped me and kept me in good health." In such phrases one can recognize a traditional religious feeling of trust in the prayers of others. "It is not until his old age," states De Tolnay, "that prayer took on for him a deep spiritual significance: then it was a direct communion with God."¹

During his stay in Rome, Michelangelo's thoughts centered on affairs of the family. His correspondence bears witness to warm affection and exceptional kindness as a son and brother. His love for them is shown by frequent gifts of money, advice on conduct in political matters, and attempting to get his brothers started in a shop which he bought for them. But the artist's generosity was repaid with ingratitude by his greedy family.

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., p. 39.

During this time, he had very few friends and associated only with few of his garzoni.¹ Raphael, his contemporary, loved and celebrated by everyone, had no friendly relationships with Michelangelo. Michelangelo with his stern, austere, masculinity was the opposite of Raphael with his sweet feminine nature. Michelangelo states that Raphael learned from his paintings and that his style changed after seeing the Sistine frescos. But Michelangelo was of such a frame that he could learn from no man. The following is recorded of him:

"Lying on his back beneath the dreary vault, communing with Dante, Savonarola, and the Hebrew prophets in intervals of labor, locking up the chapel doors in order to elude the jealous curiosity of rivals, eating but little and scarcely sleeping, he accomplished in sixteen months the first part of his gigantic task."²

After the death of Julius, Leo X became the Pope. This is the most unfruitful period of Michelangelo's life. The work he was commanded to do was never finished and Leo's whole period was characterized by delays, thwarted schemes and servile labor for Michelangelo. However, the high tide mark of his power as a sculptor is reached, as he worked on the Medici tombs in the Sacristy of San Lorenzo, Florence.

Clement VII succeeded Leo. During his years Rome was sacked by the Imperial troops; Michelangelo helped to defend his native city against the Prince of Orange. During this

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1. Men who mix paint.

2. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 25.

period Michelangelo spent most of his time in Florence, but again the period brought forth little but disappointment.

Michelangelo had now reached his fifty-ninth year.

In describing this period Symonds says:

"Leonardo and Raphael had already passed away, and were remembered as the giants of a bygone age of gold. Correggio was in his last year. Andrea del Sarto was dead. Nowhere except at Venice did Italian art flourish; and the mundane style of Titian was not to the sculptor's taste. He had overlived the greatness of his country, and saw Italy in ruins. Yet he was destined to survive another thirty years, and to witness still worse days. When we call Michelangelo the interpreter of the burden and the pain of the Renaissance, we must remember this long, weary old age, during which in solitude and silence he watched the extinction of Florence, the institution of the Inquisition, and the abasement of the Italian spirit beneath the tyranny of Spain. His sonnets, written chiefly in this latter period of life, turn often on the thought of death. His love of art yields to religious hope and fear, and he bemoans a youth and manhood spent in vanity."¹

4. Latter Years and Death

In 1534, Paul III was made Pope. Michelangelo, having shed "lustre" on the reigns of Julius, Leo, and Clement, now is at the mercy of Pope Paul. The Pope found him at work on the tomb of Julius, for the "tragedy of the mausoleum" still dragged on. Michelangelo was forced to lay aside the chisel once more and to take up the brush. From 1534 to 1542, eight years, he labored at the fresco, the "Last Judgment," devoting his terrible genius to a subject worthy of the times he lived in. During this time he was

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1. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 26.

also made the chief architect, as well as sculptor and painter of the Holy See. Thus he was called upon to superintend the building of St. Peter's, on which he devoted the last years of his life.

As age advances, Michelangelo's sonnets breathe an almost ascetic spirit of religion as his thoughts turn more and more to piety. His brothers had died but his nephew's son, called Michelangelo, became very dear to the artist's heart for he hoped that the youth would cause his name to endure and flourish. This brought great consolation and satisfaction to the aged artist as is evidenced by his correspondence. Symonds, following closely the account of Vasari and Condivi, describes Michelangelo's last years thus:

"Wealth now belonged to him; but he never cared for money, and he continued to live like a poor man, dressing soberly and eating sparingly, often taking but one meal in the day, and that of bread and wine. He slept little, and rose by night to work upon his statues, wearing a cap with a candle stuck in front of it that he might see where to drive the chisel home. During his whole life he had been solitary, partly by preference, partly by devotion to his art, and partly because he kept men at a distance by his manner. Not that Michelangelo was sour or haughty: but he spoke his mind out very plainly, had no tolerance for fools, and was apt to fly into passions. Time had now softened his temper and removed all causes of discouragement. He had survived every rival, and the world was convinced of his supremacy. Princes courted him; the Count of Canossa was proud to claim him for a kinsman; strangers when they visited Rome, were eager to behold in him its greatest living wonder. His old age was the serene and splendid evening of a toilsome day . . ."¹

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1. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 27.

It is doubtful whether Michelangelo was handsome. Early in youth a fellow pupil broke his nose with a blow of the fist. "Henceforth," states Symonds, "the artist's soul looked forth from a sad face, with small gray eyes, flat nostrils, and rugged weight of jutting jaws."¹ Thus destiny took great care that no light love should trifle with the man who was to be the prophet of his age. Nothing is implied that Michelangelo was a lover until he reached the age of sixty. Great tenderness and passion is then poured out in the poems of his later years.

In 1534, he met a noble woman, Vittoria Colonna, a widow of forty-four years. Living in retirement in Rome, she took up her leisure time with poetry and philosophy. Distinguished men visited her and the subject that was most on her heart was the reform of the Church and the restoration of religion to its evangelical purity. A tender affection sprang up between these two. Michelangelo may be said to have loved her with all the pent up forces in his heart--if this exalted and yet fervid attachment may be called love. Together they would speak of art and piety and when separated, they exchanged poems and letters, some of which remain. In 1547, this friendship came to a close with the death of Vittoria. It is said that Michelangelo waited at her bedside, and kissed her hand when she was

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1. Ibid., p. 27.

dying. The light of life seemed to grow dim in the artist's life after her departure.

Michelangelo's last message took the form of another Pietà in marble, the theme being essentially the same as that with which he made his debut at the age of twenty-four. He was now free from the demanding patrons; he now worked for himself and God. How different this work is as he, in his eighties, views life retrospectively. Tenderly, the strong Joseph of Arimathea lowers the Beloved from the Cross. All hope is gone. The path entered so hopefully is strewn with the wrecks of perished ambitions.¹

The last moment came for this strong, solitary spirit to be released on the eighteenth of February, 1564. Symonds states that:

"Having bequeathed his soul to God, his body to the earth, and his worldly possessions to his kinsfolk, praying them on his death-bed to think upon Christ's passion, he breathed his last."²

His corpse, being transported to Florence, was buried with great pomp and honor in the Church of Santa Croce.

D. Distinctive Characteristics of Michelangelo

1. The Artist

Michelangelo knew nothing of merriment and jest. He never jested himself, nor more than smiled slightly at the

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., pp. 211-215.

2. Masters in Art, April, 1901, p. 28.

jests of others. He had no pleasure outside of his work; nor was he ever acquainted with love, courtship and marriage. His only close friend was the Countess Colonna and he only took pride and pleasure in his immediate family.

Michelangelo had no friendly relationships with his fellow artists. It seems strange that so outstanding and original an artistic personality should have had more enemies than friends in the circle of contemporary artists. No doubt the grandiose commissions which Michelangelo received aroused jealousy and his creative power engendered envy and fear. Even Pope Leo X writes of Michelangelo that¹ he inspires fear in everyone--even in the popes.

Michelangelo was a pitiless critic. He never explained himself, this mystery constituting the greatest charm to the minds of his admirers. He was a hero. This is especially brought out by the fact that a long time after he had painted the ceiling, he could neither read a book nor write a letter except by holding it above his head. He was free from weakness, no flaw physically or spiritually, a very commendable characteristic as one looks at the lives of artists about him. If temperament was the cornerstone of Raphael's nature and intellect of Leonardo's, certainly² character predominated in Michelangelo's.

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1. De Tolnay, op. cit., pp. 17-19.

2. Stearns, op. cit., p. 169.

Single-mindedness and mental selection characterize him further as an artist. Stearns states that all the great virtues, such as sincerity, fidelity, chastity, forbearance, and self-devotion may be learned of Michelangelo.¹

2. The Citizen

Michelangelo was no recluse but followed the steps of Savonarola in taking an active part in the political affairs of his city and country, even though he had to flee four different times. Conflict characterizes this aspect of his life. Symonds summarizes Michelangelo's civic life thus:

"Throughout his lifetime there continued a conflict between the artist and the citizen, the artist owing education and employment to successive members of that house, [the Medici] the citizen resenting their despotism and at times doing all that in him lay to keep them out of Florence. As a patriot, as the student of Dante and the disciple of Savonarola, Michelangelo detested tyrants. As an artist, owing his advancement to Lorenzo, he had accepted favors binding him by ties of gratitude to the Medici, and even involving him in the downfall of their house. [Under Leo X and Clement VIII, the two Medician Popes, he had to work, yet he could not keep his tongue from speaking openly against their despotism] . . . It is thus clear that the patriot, the artist, and the man of honor were at odds in him . . . Hence arose a compromise and a confusion, hard to accommodate with our conception of his upright and unyielding temper. Only by voluntary exile, and after age had made him stubborn to resist seductive offers, could Michelangelo² declare himself a citizen who held no truce with tyrants."

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1. Ibid.

2. Masters in Art, April, 1901, pp. 22-23.

E. Summary

Michelangelo's letters give much information regarding his life and the character of the times in which he lived. Before noting the facts of Michelangelo's life, the artistic, philosophical, and religious influences were considered. It was found that contemporary art had little influence upon his paintings but that he was a pioneer in figure art and found his inspiration in Greek sculpture and in the study of the human anatomy. It was noted that while only a youth Michelangelo became well acquainted with Greek philosophy and the Humanism of his day. The full blossoming of humanism and the corruption of the Papacy gave rise to Savonarola's great campaign in seeking to establish a theocratic government in Florence which left its imprint on the soul of the young artist. The distinctive characteristics of Michelangelo were found to be his great devotion to his work, to his family and to Vittoria Colonna. However, he disliked the society of the artists, of the papal court and those with great wealth and prestige. In his civic relations, Michelangelo is found to be a man who did not withdraw in difficult times but tried to support the just and the right even though it meant inner conflict throughout his life. Thus obedience to conviction characterizes him as an artist and as a citizen.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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A. Restatement of Problem

Since art and religion have their roots deep in human nature, art being in its earliest forms through and through religious, it is commonly agreed that religious truths and concepts find a very satisfactory means of expression in art. Each medium presents certain unique characteristics in expressing these religious truths. Furthermore, each individual artist utilizes these unique characteristics in his own distinctive manner in giving expression to religious truth. Fra Angelico and Michelangelo were no exception, but their paintings give evidence to certain individual characteristics of interpretation of religion. Herein rested the problem of this thesis.

B. Summary of Findings

In the introduction to the present study, it was stated that art before and during the Reformation had a great influence upon the propagation of religious truth. In the first chapter the study of the paintings of Fra Angelico gave evidence of a striking transition in his religious interpretation moving from the transcendent to

the immanent concept of the Deity. This was noted in particular in his representations of the Madonna and Child. Many of his paintings represented heavenly scenes with angels, saints and the Virgin present. Expression was given also to many intimate scenes of Christ's earthly life and to ecclesiastical representations of the clergy and the Pope. Fra Angelico was able to produce an "unearthly harmony" in his use of bright and pure colors in representing the scenes of paradise. Likewise his horizontal and vertical lines speak of serenity, silence and meditation. A brilliant light sheds its lustre over many of his heavenly representations. As for form, he never presented it in a purely scientific manner, and his composition is always marked by extreme simplicity. The great meticulousity which characterized Fra Angelico's treatment of the paintings gave expression to his love and adoration for his personages. The values in terms of the impression as a whole were found to be varied, the outstanding sentiment common to all of his representations being resignation.

When considering Michelangelo's paintings in the second chapter, a striking change was also noted in his figure art. In his earlier paintings he represented the human form according to normal build, that is, according to nature; later, Michelangelo was given to exaggerations, which resulted in his figures having a tormented and grotesque appearance. He showed great sensitivity to color

in his many representations of struggle in the human soul. Conflict and torment can be felt in his use of diagonal lines and sharp angles in his figure art, light and shadow serving only to bring out these characteristics more strongly. At times, his use of form gives emphasis to the scientific exclusively, but more often, the scientific is accompanied with real spiritual depth. His composition is usually characterized by great complexity. For subject matter he often turned to heroic scenes of the Old Testament; Greek literature, philosophy and art contributing to his interpretation of these scenes. For his last painting, however, he turns to the Apocalypse, finding therein a release for his pent up emotions. The qualities of sculpture were carried into his paintings which enabled him to leave a strong impression of power upon the mind of the observer. In terms of the varied values of the whole, the outstanding one was Michelangelo's representation of the struggles of the human soul, the predominant note being that of suffering.

In the third and fourth chapters, the times and lives of Fra Angelico and Michelangelo were considered respectively. It was noted in the third chapter that art and philosophy as well as the church were influenced by the infiltrating Neo-Platonism. Fra Angelico, though in sympathy with the new artistic trends, restrained himself from taking part in the pagan practices of the church, but

instead withdrew to the monastery seeking there to live a holy, quiet life and give expression to this life in his paintings. He possessed the simple faith of a child and sought to "practice the presence of God" in every aspect of his daily life. He was a man who sought out the poor and sick and aged with his love and sympathy and was revered highly by the church and by everyone who came in contact with him.

In the fourth chapter, the study of the times and life of Michelangelo revealed that Neo-Platonism had reached its full bloom in a thorough-going Humanism. Its impact upon art, philosophy and the life and practices of the church were noted. Michelangelo in his earlier years was an ardent student of Greek philosophy and literature, but in later life he turned away from these. No doubt his early contact with Savonarola created an inner conflict with the Platonic concepts of life. Michelangelo's entire life is characterized by struggle and suffering, partly because of his personal pride, partly because of circumstances, but mainly because of the vice that he saw and felt in Rome and Italy. A man of tremendous will power, he was feared and respected by everyone but loved by only a few. He was a genius excelling in sculpture and architecture. He was no recluse, but served his country in war and in peace, striving to restore its spiritual life. In his later years, he turned wholly to the Christian teachings for comfort and hope.

C. Conclusion

Any painting which is a real work of art carries its message and appeal to the observer whether he is familiar with the artist's life and times or not. However, from this study, it has become evident that a knowledge of the artist's own unique manner in which he utilized the elements of painting has a definite relation to his personal life and to his readiness to give expression to his faith in life and conduct. As this correspondence between the artist's life and paintings becomes evident, the paintings take on a richer meaning for the lover of God and of art.

In the light of this conclusion, the Christian educator needs to avail himself of every opportunity whereby these great religious paintings may speak more clearly to this present age and become more effective mediums through which the lives of men and women may be changed.

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