

## The Painter as Evangelist in Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ*\*

Anthony Apesos

For Leo Steinberg

Although the fleeing figure on the extreme left of Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* (1602) (Fig. 1) has been called the Apostle John, this identification, beginning with Walter Friedlaender's note in *Caravaggio Studies*,<sup>1</sup> has more often been denied, questioned, or ignored. I will demonstrate this figure can only be St. John, the beloved Apostle, and thus provides a dramatic contrast within the picture to the traitor Judas. Also and more important, when understood with the figure on the extreme right, the fleeing John is only spatially peripheral; the two figures, when taken together form a pair that offers insights both into Caravaggio's spirituality and into his ideas on the mission of the painter.

Before the painting was rediscovered in 1993, its composition was known and discussed.<sup>2</sup> Giovan Pietro Bellori described the picture: "Marchese Asbrubale Mattei had him paint the *Taking of Christ in the Garden*, which is in half-figures. Judas lays his hand on the shoulder of the Lord after the kiss, and a soldier in full armor extends his arm and his ironclad hand to the chest of the Lord who stands patiently and humbly with his arms crossed before him; behind St. John is seen fleeing with outstretched arms. Caravaggio indicated even the rust of the armor of the soldier whose head is covered by a helmet so that only his profile can be seen; behind him a lantern is raised and one can distinguish two more heads of armed men."<sup>3</sup> In 1943, based on this description, Roberto Longhi identified two copies of the painting<sup>4</sup> and since then at least eight more have been found.<sup>5</sup>

Believing he was correcting Bellori, Friedlaender wrote in 1955, "In accordance with Mark (14:51-52) the youth who runs away at the left is not St. John... but a young follower of Christ..."<sup>6</sup> In this "correction" Friedlaender

---

\*I would like to thank the librarians at the Art Institute of Boston for their patience, David Steinberg for his sensitive reading and suggestions to improve this paper, and Natasha Seaman for the above and more.

<sup>1</sup> Walter F. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton, 1974, 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>3</sup> In *ibid.*, 249.

<sup>4</sup> Roberto Longhi, "Ultimi Studi sul Caravaggio e la sua Cerchia," *Proporzioni*, I, 1943, 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio and His Copyists*, New York, 1976, 109-110.

<sup>6</sup> Friedlaender, 173.

is followed by Howard Hibbard,<sup>7</sup> Sergio Benedetti,<sup>8</sup> Kristina Herman Fiore,<sup>9</sup> and Creighton Gilbert.<sup>10</sup> Benedetti<sup>11</sup> later changed his mind and Catherine Puglisi<sup>12</sup> followed him. In none of these assertions and counter assertions has the identity of Caravaggio's fleeing figure been definitively argued, so that in 1998 Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit<sup>13</sup> could say that his identity is ambiguous and Helen Langdon<sup>14</sup> in the same year presented alternatives but offered no definitive opinion. The 1999 exhibition of Caravaggio's *Arrest of Christ* in the National Gallery of Art in Washington provided a brochure whose discussion of the painting retreated from all identifications of this figure with the noncommittal "follower of Christ."<sup>15</sup>

If an argument as to the identity of this figure is to be offered, a look at the Gospel accounts of Christ's arrest is a necessary preparation. The four Gospels show Christ in the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples; in Mark's and Luke's Gospels, the three Apostles, Peter, James, and John, are asked to accompany him while he goes to pray. After his prayer, while Christ addresses these three, Judas arrives with a crowd—a heavily armed crowd, according to Matthew and Luke. In Matthew and Mark, Judas kisses Jesus; in Luke he is about to do so, but it is not stated there that Judas' lips

---

<sup>7</sup> Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, New York, 1983, 290, n. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Sergio Benedetti, "Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ*, a Masterpiece Rediscovered," *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXV/1088, 1993, 738.

<sup>9</sup> Kristina Herrman Fiore, "Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* and Dürer's Woodcut of 1509," *Burlington Magazine*, XXXXVII/1102, 1995, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Creighton Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals*, University Park, 1995, 135-41.

<sup>11</sup> Benedetti, "Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* (Letter to the Editor)," *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXVII/1102, 1995, 37-38.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine R. Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, London, 1998, 221.

<sup>13</sup> Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, Cambridge, 1998, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A Life*, New York, 1999, 234.

<sup>15</sup> "Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ*," exh. brochure, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1999. Notice of the fleeing figure appeared in three reviews of exhibitions where Caravaggio's painting was featured. Theodore Rabb, "When Baroque Passion Ignited Renaissance Cool," *New York Times*, Arts and Leisure, April 2001, 39 calls the figure merely a disciple. Ingrid Rowland, "The Real Caravaggio," *The New York Review of Books*, October 7, 1999, 11 writes about "the fleeing disciple on the far left—John to judge by his age, his anguished attractiveness, and the traditional colors of his clothes." Knowing the literature on this painting, she includes the hint of a hedge in her identification. Christine Temmin, "Caravaggio Magnifico," *Boston Globe*, January 26, 1999 refers to the figure without any hesitation as John. It is worth noting that Temmin is not a scholar of the Italian Baroque, but an art critic. Her ignorance of what has been written about this painting, is not, as I will show, to be lamented.

actually touch Christ. In Matthew and Mark the soldiers then seize Christ, and one of those with Jesus cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. In Luke, these two moments happen in reverse order and Luke also adds that Christ healed the servant's ear. In Mark and Matthew all of Christ's followers who are present then flee. This is not stated in Luke. Mark adds to the flight of the Apostles an element not in the other accounts: "And a certain young man followed him, having a linen cloth cast about around his naked body, and they laid hold on him. But he, casting off the linen cloth, fled from them naked" (Mark 14:51-52). All three synoptic accounts agree that Christ was then led away to the high priest. The Gospel of John amends these accounts by omitting the kiss, identifying Peter as the disciple who cut off the servant's ear, and by naming this servant Malchus. John also adds that the armed crowd held lanterns and torches. This crowd, according to John, when addressed by Jesus, all fell down, apparently momentarily. John does not mention the flight of the Apostles nor of anyone else at the scene.

There is sufficient complexity and contradiction among the four Gospels that an illustrator has plenty from which to pick and choose. In paintings from the *Trecento* to the early seventeenth century, certain variations exist. The armed mob and Christ are, of course, indispensable. Caravaggio limits the mob to four men but a greater number is implied by their crowding in the picture and the presence on the right of the black vertical diagonals of lances. Caravaggio includes the unsurprising detail of the presence of lanterns which John's Gospel mentions, and he is not alone in this inclusion. The kiss of Judas is in most depictions, but in a few examples, it is either yet to come, or it is already accomplished, and, in these cases, Judas is often shown running away, usually holding a prominent sack of coins. The exclusion that is most significant in Caravaggio's picture is Peter cutting off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. This event is described in all four Gospels and it is found with few exceptions in most depictions of the scene. Gilbert asserts that paintings of the arrest of Christ include the "almost invariable group of disciples clustered around Christ as he is kissed."<sup>16</sup> A glance shows that the inclusion of the disciples "clustered around Christ as he is kissed" is actually present in *none* of the depictions discussed by Gilbert and in no other that I have been able to find. Those Apostles with Christ, when mentioned in the four Gospels are either fleeing or, if Peter, attacking, thus offering no option for an illustration of this scene to show them "clustering." It is the mob come to arrest Christ that is always shown so closely grouped around him.

**The Presence of the Apostle John.** The flight of the Apostles is an infrequently depicted subject. The motif of the fleeing young man who is

---

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert, 140.

stripped of his linen garment is even rarer. Several examples before the sixteenth century offer little to indicate the identification of the fleeing youth. The best known is Giotto's painting of the Arrest in the Arena Chapel (Fig. 2). Here a figure has run out of the left side of the fresco, leaving the viewer to see only part of his face, halo, and his cloak, which is in the process of being pulled off of him by a member of the mob. By the halo we can guess that the fleeing figure is one of the Apostles, but too little is visible to reveal which one. Since Peter is busy with Malchus' ear, the assumption would be that it is either James or John; this is likely to be correct but not necessarily, as shown by Duccio's panel from the Maestà. There, seven Apostles exit the scene to the right although none is being stripped bare. Barna da Siena (Fig. 3), if we count the mass of overlapping halos on the left, shows all the Apostles running away except for the attacking Peter, and one of them is having his robe pulled away. By his pointed beard, he cannot be John but he is likely to be James, who is often so depicted. This identification is corroborated by a few commentators, most notably St. Epiphanius, who does say that the fleeing youth in Mark's Gospel is James.<sup>17</sup> But most authorities, from Gregory the Great,<sup>18</sup> continuing through Erasmus<sup>19</sup> and the great Counter-Reformatory church historian Baronius would have agreed neither with Epiphanius' argument nor Barna's depiction;<sup>20</sup> the majority opinion insists that the fleeing youth is John. At least one *Quattrocento* picture exists that clearly agrees; Bartolommeo di Tomasso's panel (Fig. 4) in the Metropolitan Museum shows only three Apostles on the scene of the

---

<sup>17</sup> See Cornelius a Lapide, *The Great Commentary*, T.W. Mossman, trans., Edinburgh, 1908, 437.

<sup>18</sup> The Church Fathers from the fourth to the twelfth centuries who agree that the fleeing youth is John include (in chronological order): St. Ambrose (d. 397) *In Psalmam XXXVI Enarratio*, 55, *Patrologia Latina*, XIV, Paris: Garnier Freres, 1844-1891, 494; (The following were obtained from the *Patrologia Latina Database*, Jacques Paul Migne, ed., Ann Arbor, 1996-2001, <http://pld.chadwyck.com>) Gregory the Great, [S. Gregorii] *Index in Libros Moralium et Homilias S. Gregorii*, Col. 1345. Commentarii in Librum I Regum Liber Sextus, Caput II, 30; Taio Caesaraugustanus. *laonis Caesaraugustiani Episcopi Sententiarum Libri Quinquè*, Liber Secundus, caput V, Col. 0781B; The Venerable Bede [Beda]. *In Marci Evangelium Expositio*, Liber Quartus, Caput XIV, Col. 0278B- Col. 0279C; Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel [Smaragdus Abbas] *Incipunt Collectiones*, "Incipit Passio Domini Nostri Jesus Christi." Col. 0183A-Col. 0183B; Amalarius of Metz [Symphosios Amalarius] *Symphosii Amalarii Metensis Presbyteri et Chorepiscopi De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, Libri Quatuor Caput XXI, Col. 1135B-Col. 1135C; Haymo of Halberstadt [Hagmoris Halberstatensis] *Homiliarium*, Homilia LXVI, Feria Tertia Palmarum "Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Marcum." Col. 0404D-0405D; Honorus of Autun [Honorus Augustodunensis] *Gemma Animae Sive*, Liber primus, Caput IX, Col. 0547C-Col. 0547D.

<sup>19</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Paraphrases on Mark*, Erika Rummel, trans., Toronto, 1988, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Caesar Baronius, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, Barri-Ducis, 1864, I: 128 no. 68.

arrest. Peter is busy attacking Malchus, and the two others are running away. One of these is being stripped of his robe, and his beardlessness, halo, and the company he is in, prove him to be St. John. In the sixteenth century, this subject, as we will see, becomes a little less rare.

Baronius wrote about the fleeing youth in the *Annales*, which were considered of the highest authority and were widely read throughout Europe.<sup>21</sup> In the *Annales* he wrote:

From here all the disciples fled, with him left behind, and the young man who was following him, wrapped with a linen garment over his naked body, since he was taken, fled naked with the garment left behind. This man is believed to have been John, still wearing at that time his dining garment, as it was said previously, when the Lord's supper took place. It is appropriate to consider (if in doubtful affairs one may stipulate with a conjecture) that this was the disciple most beloved by Jesus, since he had recognized the betrayal of Judas more clearly than the rest. He was affected by a certain vehement grief, and was so much mindful of the Lord, buried by a profound forgetfulness of his own self, that he thought nothing about putting on his own clothes. And since it was night when they came back from the dining room, it was very easily possible that he and the others had forgotten it. That this man was John the Evangelist, Ambrose especially bears witness, and similarly to Gregory the Great, Bede, and very many others. But if anyone of the more recent [scholars] feels differently from this opinion, then it is most likely because he has ignored the reason why John had a linen garment wrapped over his naked body.<sup>22</sup>

One of these "recent" writers to whom Baronius is probably responding is Cajetan, who wrote briefly on the subject in a short book of ruminations on New Testament subjects, called *Ietacula Novi Testamenti*, published in

---

<sup>21</sup> On the fame and authority of Baronius throughout Europe, see Lady Amabel Kern, *The Life of Cesare Cardinal Baronius*, New York, 1898; Cyriac K. Pullapilly, *Caesar Baronius: Counter-Reformation Historian*, Notre Dame, 1975. Measures of Baronius' prominence as well as of the fame of the *Annales* includes several especially notable indications: after the publication of the first volume of the *Annales* in 1588, popes and princes competed to have subsequent volumes dedicated to themselves; the work was translated almost immediately into Italian and soon after into other European languages; he was confessor to Filippo Neri and to Pope Clement VIII; he was made rector of the Roman Oratory and Superior General of the entire congregation. For Baronius' influence on art, see Josephine von Henneberg, "Cardinal Caesar Baronius, the Arts, and the Early Christian Martyrs," in *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, Franco Mormando, ed., Boston, 1999, 136-150.

<sup>22</sup> Baronius, 128 no. 68. Trans. by Stephen D. Smith.

1525.<sup>23</sup> Cajetan's writing is also the principal source for Gilbert's argument<sup>24</sup> that the figure from the far left of Caravaggio's picture is not John the Apostle. Through an examination of iconographical precedent and exegetical tradition I will demonstrate that John is the correct identification.

Gilbert discusses four sixteenth-century Italian depictions of the arrest of Christ which may be considered precedents to Caravaggio's painting.<sup>25</sup> Three were painted in Rome: Taddeo Zuccaro's fresco in S. Maria della Consolazione (Fig. 5), Cavaliere d'Arpino's panel now in the Galleria Borghese (Fig. 6), and the anonymous fresco in the Oratory of the Gonfalone (Fig. 7). Caravaggio would have known these paintings: his patrons the Mattei, had been early patrons of Taddeo; Caravaggio had been employed in the Cavaliere's workshop and was later his primary rival; the Oratory of the Gonfalone was a showcase of late *maniera* pictorial ideas, and one fresco there (not the Betrayal) was commissioned by Caravaggio's patron, Cardinal Mattei.<sup>26</sup> Each of these depictions of the Arrest of Christ prominently shows a fleeing youth in the process of being stripped naked in his flight from Christ's arrest. Gilbert identifies the precedent for all these depictions of the fleeing youth in a lost painting by Correggio known now through copies (Fig. 8). Gilbert finds this link to the Correggio significant because that painting is contemporaneous with the 1525 publication by the anti-Lutheran polemicist Cajetan. There, Cajetan says that the youth in Mark's account is not John the Evangelist but an innocent bystander. Cajetan reasons that, since Mark wrote that the Apostles had fled before the nude youth appears, the youth could not be one of the Apostles.<sup>27</sup> Although Cajetan does not state it, Gilbert sees in his writing a timely anti-Lutheran implication. To support his reading, Gilbert cites the *Great Commentary* on the Gospels by the Jesuit Cornelius à Lapide,<sup>28</sup> despite the chronological irrelevance of Lapide's commentary to a direct understanding of Correggio or Caravaggio's paintings—it was published in 1638, more than 100 years after the one and 36 years after the other was painted. Lapide agrees with Cajetan's identification. He argues that if some bystander fled the scene in

---

<sup>23</sup> Tommaso de Vio Gaetani Cajetan, *Ietacula Novi Testamenti*, Rome, 1525, Jenticulum V, Section 4. Copy consulted at Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert, 135-141.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>27</sup> That Cajetan's logic may be appealing to a modern reader is of course irrelevant to a discussion of tradition of the iconography of the scene.

<sup>28</sup> Cornelius à Lapide, *The Great Commentary*, T.W. Mossman, trans., Edinburgh, 1908.

fear then the Apostles are not to be considered cowards to flee but were actually in real danger and correct to escape. Gilbert extrapolates a defense of the papacy from Lapedes commentary and, along with it, Cajetan's reasoning that, if Peter, the first pope, was justified in escaping, then he is absolved of error.<sup>29</sup> According to Gilbert, the paintings of Caravaggio and his sixteenth-century Italian predecessors who depicted the subject are influenced by Cajetan's tract and therefore the fleeing figure from Mark's Gospel who appears in their paintings is an anonymous bystander and not one of the Apostles.

Before we look at these Italian depictions, we can gain some perspective on Gilbert's argument by a glance at two prints of Albrecht Dürer on this subject.<sup>30</sup> In both the *Engraved Passion* (Fig. 9) of 1508 and the *Large Passion* of 1510 (Fig. 10), the youth is depicted fleeing in the distant background, seventeen and fifteen years respectively before the publication of Cajetan's *letacula*. The fleeing youth, as an example of Dürer's well known influence on the motifs of sixteenth-century Italian art, makes Cajetan seem much less relevant. Correggio's painting in particular is especially close to Dürer in the crowding of the figures around Christ, the abandonment with which the youth flees, and in the spatial removal of the crowd from the youth and his pursuer. Once this influence is seen, it becomes clear that Correggio's painting is largely a reversal of foreground and background of Dürer's print of the Arrest in the *Engraved Passion*. Gilbert does not cite the Dürer prints, but perhaps in the face of them, it could still be said that their influence on the Italians does not exclude the possibility of the influence on them of the *letacula* as well. Certainly there is no clue in Dürer's prints as to the identity of the fleeing youth. Are the Italian examples of this subject from Correggio to Caravaggio equally unrevealing of the identity of the figure in flight?

John is customarily identified by several attributes: his youth, usually shown by beardlessness; fairish hair; and the color of his clothing, usually red and green in Italy and usually all red north of the Alps.<sup>31</sup> Youth and

---

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert, 140-141.

<sup>30</sup> Fiore, 24-27 discusses Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* in relation to Dürer's 1509 Small Passion (woodcut), but does not consider the two prints discussed here.

<sup>31</sup> Although these colors of St. John are commonplaces in iconographic handbooks from Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, Boston, 1894, I: 152 through George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, New York, 1961, 151-152, to verify them, I have made a systematic (if unscientific) survey of the saint's colors. To do this I extensively consulted illustrated books, with color reproductions, on twelve major museums. Although these books cannot offer a complete view of depictions of St. John, certainly they can be assumed to give a random sampling. Out of approximately 3,800 paintings before 1650, there were 141 depictions of St. John; of these, 69 were in red and green (45 of these by Italians), 34 in red only (of these

beardlessness are of no help in the question of who is the fleeing young man; can the color of the garments be useful? In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there are exceptional depictions of John where he is not wearing these colors but what is more significant is that these colors seem to be very rarely worn by the other Apostles and infrequently by anyone else.<sup>32</sup> The fleeing figure in the Correggio created no confusion for the compiler of a 1569 inventory that lists a copy of this painting as "a St. John fleeing when Christ is taken in the Garden."<sup>33</sup> Although the original is lost, surviving copies show the garment the young man is losing to be brilliant red—if Correggio were illustrating Cajetan he would have painted a white garment showing it to be linen and not confused matters by painting it red, the color that the heretical Germans used to clothe their depictions of the youngest Apostle.

In the Taddeo Zuccaro painting, the fleeing figure is losing white linen garments. If we look at Taddeo's fresco of Christ and the Apostles in Gethsemane (Fig. 11) that decorates the quadrant of the ceiling immediately next to Christ's arrest we can clearly identify all three Apostles. Peter and James are both bearded; Peter is the more robust of the two and John is sleeping beside them, youthful, beardless, fair haired, and in his red and green colors. If John is examined closely we see that he alone of the three Apostles has at his collar and cuffs the evidence of a white undergarment. Its presence possibly provides continuity between the identity of this figure and the fleeing youth in the accompanying fresco. As the following look at several other paintings of St. John will show, this possibility is a likelihood.

Garofalo's painting of the *Ascension of Christ* (Fig. 12) shows eleven bearded Apostles plus one who is young, blond, and beardless and who wears a green tunic and red robe; both of these are pulled back at the leg and right shoulder and left arm to reveal a loose white undergarment. No

---

28 were not by Italians), 22 were in red and blue (red and blue is more common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: of these 22 counted, 14 were painted before 1500). Sixteen were in assorted other colors. The illustrations used to make these tabulations were in the following books: Santiago Alcolea Blanch, *The Prado*, New York, 1996; Colin Eisler, *Paintings in the Hermitage*, New York, 1990; idem, *Masterworks in Berlin*, Boston, 1996; Fiore, ed., *Guide to the Borghese Gallery*, Rome, 1997; Lawrence Gowing, *Paintings in the Louvre*, New York, 1987; Mina Gregori, *Paintings in the Uffizzi and Pitti Galleries*, New York, 1994; Hibbard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1986; Lorenza Mochi Onori and Rossella Vodret, *Capolavori della Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica Palazzo Barberini*, Rome, 1998; Michael Wilson, *The National Gallery*, London, London, 1977; John Walker, *National Gallery of Art*, Washington, New York, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> In the same survey cited above, out of approximately 3,800 paintings, most of which had more than one male figure in them, making the number of male figures checked for color in excess of 8,000, of these only 36 individuals besides the St. Johns counted above, were depicted in red and green, and of these, only nine are Apostles.

<sup>33</sup> David Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, New Haven, 1997, 166.



such unusual arrangement of drapery is displayed by his eleven companions. In Massimo Stanzione's *Assumption of the Virgin* (Fig. 13), there are ten bearded men and one who is beardless but bald, plus one bare faced youth with a fairness of skin only matched by that of the rising Virgin. He, like the young figure in the Garafolo, can in this time, place, and company only be John—but he wears nothing but a loose fitting cloak of white that reveals his leg and falls from his shoulder. The *Four Evangelists* of Jacob Jordaens (Fig. 14) in the Louvre has three hoary old grey-beards with various degrees of baldness and amongst them is St. John, shown as a dewy youth enshrouded by a white robe. Each of these white-robed St. Johns is clothed as no other Apostle or Evangelist ever is. Consistent with most commentators on Mark's version of the arrest, his white garment in these paintings recalls the linen cloth John lost when he fled from Gethsemane. And, apparently, Caravaggio himself wished to allude to John's flight in Gethsemane in his *Death of the Virgin*; certainly it is not accidental that the figure of St. John is the only one of the twelve who wears a white undergarment apparent at the edge of his sleeve.

In both the anonymous fresco in the Oratory of the Gonfalone and in Cavaliere d'Arpino's painting in the Galleria Borghese, the youth has no trace of red or green about him—it is a white garment of which he is being divested. If one accepts that Correggio, Taddeo, and Caravaggio, in different degrees of subtlety, were asserting the identity of the youth with the Evangelist then one could ask, doesn't the lack of color attributes suggest perhaps that these other two artists were asserting Cajetan's position or at least were unsure of the figure's identity?<sup>34</sup>

This seems unlikely. The exegetical tradition from the Church Fathers through Baronius and its agreement with the visual tradition in painting of identifying John with the fleeing youth make the white-cloaked boy in the Gonfalone Oratory and in the Cavaliere panel unlikely candidates to question such well established foundations. Instead, it is more likely that the identity of the fleeing youth as St. John was so well established that underscoring the identity was seen as unnecessary by the Gonfalone artist and Cavaliere d'Arpino. That Caravaggio goes to the length of draping the fleeing youth in both red and green, contrary to the biblical account, which

---

<sup>34</sup> For the sake of completeness, I mention two other depictions of the arrest: Girolamo Muziano made a now lost drawing which was the basis for an engraving executed by Cornelius Cort published in Rome in 1568. This print shows all three of the Apostles at Gethsemane. Peter attacks Malchus; a bearded James and a barefaced John depart the scene at the left margin. Muziano made another drawing of the scene which has survived; this one shows Peter with Malchus, and only one bearded though young Apostle departing the garden through a gate on the left. A soldier turns his eyes towards him and is close enough to reach out and grab his robe before he can make his escape, implying that this figure is John. Both are reproduced in J.C.J. Bierens de Haan, *L'Oeuvre Gravé de Cornelius Cort, Graveur Hollandais 1533-1570*, The Hague, 1948, 92-93.

mentions only a linen and presumably white garment, may be significant. Gilbert notes that the *letacula* of Cajetan was first published near the date of Correggio's *Taking of Christ* and that it was republished near the time of Caravaggio's picture.<sup>35</sup> To Gilbert, there is a causal relation—both paintings he says illustrate Cajetan's identification of the youth as a bystander, not John, but an opposite deduction from the same facts is more supportable. Both Correggio and Caravaggio by depicting the youth in the beloved Apostle's canonical colors of red or red and green, respectively, are more likely to be making images that are meant to defy Cajetan's argument. That Caravaggio does this more assertively through the use of both colors can be seen as an emphatic correction of the ambiguity that his immediate Roman predecessors had allowed in the subject. Perhaps this strength of assertion was given urgency by the re-publication of Cajetan's *letacula* three times in the 1560s.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that Caravaggio's and his patrons' awareness of the canonical colors is evident in other works: in *The Entombment* (Fig. 15), a young beardless John wears the same red robe and green tunic. *The Death of the Virgin* (Fig. 16) has the mourning St. John not quite in his canonical colors, but in darkened green and deep purple, hues that are close but sorrowful relations to them.

Although there is no truth in the claims that these depictions of the fleeing figure are not St. John, Gilbert may be correct that there is a Counter-Reformatory subtext to this figure. Anna Jameson makes a persuasive suggestion:

In Albert Dürer's picture (Munich) [Fig. 17], where John is holding open the Gospel, and Peter apparently reading it; two grand and simple figures, filling the mind as we gaze upon them. As this picture was painted after Albert Dürer became a Protestant, I have thought it possible that he might have had some particular meaning in thus making Peter study the Gospel of John.<sup>37</sup>

The inclusion of the frightened fleeing John may be seen as the inverse of Dürer's St. John and so could score anti-Lutheran points even more effectively than an anonymous fleeing youth would. In Dürer's painting the first pope is shown being instructed by the Evangelist; Peter may hold the

---

<sup>35</sup> Gilbert, 141.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Jameson, 155. Jameson's view of the relationship between Peter and John is supported by what we know of Luther's sentiments towards John's Gospel. See Craig Harbison, "Dürer and the Reformation: The Problem of the Re-Dating of the *St. Philip* Engraving," *Art Bulletin*, LVIII/3, 1976, 368-373.

Keys to the Kingdom, but John holds the word of God in his hands. Caravaggio—by concentrating on the fear of John, who was not only an Apostle but also an Evangelist, the author of the Book of Revelations, the most beloved of Apostles, the protector of the Virgin Mary after Christ's death, and Peter's companion in his missions—is making the flight of the first pope, Peter, less blameworthy. If, as Gilbert asserts, the goal of showing the fleeing youth is to exculpate Peter of cowardice, is it not more effective to have St. John the Evangelist fleeing rather than some unknown bystander?

Even so, perhaps, the question of casting blame is irrelevant; influential commentators on Mark (14:51-52) not only saw no blame in the flight of the Apostles, but stressed the wisdom, even the virtue of escape. On the fleeing youth, St. Anselm wrote:

... with his linen garment left behind, he shows the deed and character of those who so that they might be more secure, cast aside everything which they have in this world. In doing so they declare they would rather serve God nude and give up holding worldly things which are the cause of temptation. This is according to the examples of Joseph, who with his garment left behind, fled the adulteress, preferring to serve God nude than dressed in the desires of a prostitute.<sup>38</sup>

Bede also compares the fleeing John to the Old Testament Joseph,

... even the young man himself, who with his linen garment cast aside, fled from the impious, so she shows the deed and character of those who in order to become more secure from the attacks of their enemies, cast aside anything which they possess and who attest that they would rather serve the Lord nude than by adhering to worldly things... in like manner is the example of the blessed Joseph, who left his mantle in the hands of an adulteress, preferring to serve God nude than to serve a prostitute.<sup>39</sup>

Gregory the Great had Joseph in mind when he wrote of the flight of John,

For a young man is captured by his clothing, when he is thoroughly praised in the beginning about his good behavior. But with his

---

<sup>38</sup> St. Anselm, [Anselmus Laudunensis] *Enarrationes in Evangelium Matthaei*, Caput XXVI, Col. 1477B, *Patrologia Latina* (see n. 18), trans. by Steven D. Smith.

<sup>39</sup> See n. 18, trans. by Steven D. Smith.

linen garment left behind, he flees nude he who deems worthless the praises that he hears. For to flee nude is to lead a praise-worthy life, but to look down upon a praise of a chosen life. For it is as if he flees nude, he who ascribes nothing to himself about the adornment of virtues on account of an empty glory.<sup>40</sup>

According to these Church Fathers, the flight of John was not merely the attempt to escape physical harm or death, but was like the flight of Joseph from Potiphar's wife; it is a movement toward a future life of virtue which is a duty to seek.<sup>41</sup>

Although Bersani and Dutoit would have us believe that in Caravaggio's *Arrest* the figure of John is unidentifiable,<sup>42</sup> they do emphasize one important observation already made by Benedetti.<sup>43</sup> John, in their words, "seems to be a growth on Christ's body. They have identical hair, and they seem to be attached at the head like Siamese twins."<sup>44</sup> Not only are they linked but at the same time they are going in opposite directions. Christ the incarnate word, the son of man, must go to the sacrifice to die and be resurrected. John and, by synecdochal implication, all the Apostles must live and tell of it. The twinning of Christ and John and the merging of the structure of their heads shows economically and emphatically that the Apostles being the first bishops and the prototypes for the priesthood, and thus the Church which they propagated, are emanations of Christ himself.

---

<sup>40</sup> See n. 18, trans. by Steven D. Smith.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between flight and pilgrimage, see Walter Melion, "Ad ductum itineris et dispositionem mansionum ostendendam: Meditation, Vocation, and Sacred History in Abraham Ortelius's *Parergon*," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 57, 1999, 49-27.

<sup>42</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 56-58. Their assertion that "there are no locatable identities" (58) is essential to their agenda of ambiguity. They assert, in keeping with their deconstructionist mission, that Christ and John "are wearing similarly colored capes" (56); a glance reveals John in a green tunic and Christ in an orange one, John in a red robe and Christ in a blue one. Caravaggio has carefully clothed his actors in contrasting costumes of exquisitely complementing colors but to Bersani and Dutoit's eyes, they are dressed the same. Bersani and Dutoit also ask of the figure of John, "...is he rushing in horror from the scene we see, or are his arms raised to stop some other violent movement about to invade the painting from the outside left?" (56) To the first clause of this question, the answer is yes; to the second, it is no. The facts that none of the four biblical accounts of the arrest of Christ imply that the presence of any other "violent movement" aside from the seizure of Christ and Peter's attempted defense, and that the body language of John's raised arms is consistent with the established body language of flight seen in Early Modern paintings (including in Caravaggio's own oeuvre) do not faze Bersani and Dutoit; for them interpretation is an exercise in free association.

<sup>43</sup> Benedetti 1995, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 56.

Through his escape, John lived, later to be an Evangelist and the protector of Mary, *mater ecclesia*, the personification of the Church. His necessary survival leads directly to the priesthood's dual function as propagator and protector of the faith.

**Judas.** Enframed by the flying red robe of the fleeing Apostle, the figures of Christ, John, and Judas make a separate unit in the composition that distills the drama within the community of Christ and his disciples. The Gospels relate that the Apostles were called by Christ to follow him. Judas, of all the Apostles, does not understand Christ's demand of submission to his will. Before Judas' betrayal of Christ there is one incident told variously in all four Gospels that concerns Judas and his interaction with Christ. A woman, traditionally considered to be Mary Magdalene, anoints Christ with an expensive ointment. She is admonished by one of the Apostles, who in the Gospel of John is said to be Judas. Judas says that the cost of the oil could have been better spent on the poor. The Gospel of John gives his motive as avarice disguised by hypocrisy ("Now he said this, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the purse, carried the things that were put therein." John 12:6). But it is also obvious that Judas' statement is actually a reasonable opinion. Christ dismisses Judas' words and praises the woman for her gift. In the Gospels of Matthew (26:14-16) and Mark (14:10-11) Judas' immediate response is to go to the high priest and offer his services in trapping Jesus. Christ's dismissal of Judas' reasonable opinion thus leads directly to the betrayal. In this one explicit account of the relations between Christ and his betrayer the distance between them is shown.

The alienation of Judas from Christ and the other Apostles is made spatially clear in most paintings of the Last Supper. Judas, alone on the wrong side of the table (Fig. 18), looks away from Christ who holds the sleeping Apostle John in his arms. We know that Judas is about to flee in order to meet with those who will soon arrest Christ. Caravaggio's *Betrayal* inverts the Last Supper: the recently embraced Apostle runs away, and the distant Judas embraces Christ. While doing so, Judas looks at Christ but equally looks through him toward the fleeing John. John, as the stand-in for all the Apostles and, particularly, as the most beloved and therefore the most hated by Judas, is an appropriate target for the betrayer's attention. In betraying Christ, Judas is also rejecting the community of loving obedience that was the circle of the Apostles. Not loved by Christ because of his inability to follow, Judas in return hates the Apostles who do follow and are loved.

Caravaggio's attitude toward John in his picture, as belied by the painterly inattention he grants this figure, is another matter. John's face (Fig. 19) is plainly not on the same level of pictorial accomplishment as that of the other heads. All the other faces are sharply individualized and utterly convincing in volume and chiaroscuro. This is not so with John. The wrinkles

of his brow are schematic in both the evenness of the intervals between them and in their unvaried parallelism. The setting of the eye within the upper and lower lids and the drawing of the lashes are also, relative to those of the other faces, schematic. The sense of tension at the edges of the wide open mouth is missing; the lighting on the lower lip, on the lower visible quarter of the orbicular oris muscle, and on the chin are without the subtle variety of value that the other details of the painting lead the viewer to expect. John is not an individual personality as all the other characters in the painting are; he is merely a figure in an unconflicted attitude of fear.

Caravaggio is deeply concerned with the complex emotions revealed on the faces of the betrayed leader and his treacherous follower. He is also interested in the appearance of the soldiers going about their job. But the formal weakness of the painting of John's head suggests that in this picture Caravaggio's feelings for the beloved Apostle are tepid. To connect this observation with what we know of Caravaggio's violent life is a step to be taken cautiously, but it is also unavoidable. Caravaggio was a man involved in street brawls, who had difficulties with the law<sup>45</sup> and who would have experienced the dynamics of male bonding in moments of physical crisis. How would such a man feel about someone who ran away in a moment of danger? Regardless of how John's flight was seen by biblical commentators, in the moment depicted here, John, to Caravaggio, is a coward on whom he expends a minimum of painterly effort. Of course Caravaggio's attitude toward John is not always the same; the John we see in the *Deposition* and the *Death of the Virgin* possesses deep pathos and nobility, but at John's moment of flight, Caravaggio's brush displays, probably unwittingly, the artist's disdain.

This is a disdain that Caravaggio shares with Judas. In considering the artist's understanding of Judas, the unexpected omission of one aspect of the story becomes not only less surprising, but, indeed, essential. Caravaggio, in works like the *Martyrdom of Matthew*, *Judith and Holofernes*, the *Death of the Baptist*, and others, shows himself to be an artist with a special ability and eagerness to depict violence. In the Gospel accounts of the Arrest of Christ, the moment that seems most suited to this special talent of Caravaggio is Peter's attack on Malchus (Fig. 20).<sup>46</sup> Peter's attempt to

---

<sup>45</sup> Langdon; Ricardo Bassani and Fiora Bellini, *Caravaggio Assassinato*, Rome, 1994. Although some of the scholarship of the latter has been called into doubt, (see M. Marino "C. Assassinato" *Il Tempo*, 18 July 1995), it paints a convincing and compelling portrait of the artist as a young thug.

<sup>46</sup> Besides those illustrated here, several other depictions of the subject with a knife-wielding Peter bear mention: Martin Schongauer's engraving; Dieric Bouts, Alte Pinakothek, Munich; Jacob Jordaens, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Copenhagen; Hendrick Goltzius, from the *Passion Engravings*; Altobello Melone, Duomo, Cremona; and Master of St. Giles, Musée Royaux des Beaux Art, Brussels. For early examples, see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of*

defend Christ with his sword is the sort of response that both Judas and Caravaggio himself would understand, but Christ admonishes Peter and heals Malchus' wound. Christ's criticism of Peter's defense of him is as counter-intuitive and mystical as his criticism of Judas' disapproval of the Magdalene's gift. In both cases, Peter and Judas are this-worldly in their responses. Their mundane attitudes are of a kind that is in profound contrast to the words of Christ. Not only would the overt violence of Peter deflect attention from the suppressed violence of Judas' embrace and kiss, but it would also deflect from the extremity of the contrast that Caravaggio is creating between Judas and the faithful Apostles as exemplified by John. The inclusion of Malchus and a sword-wielding Peter in the anonymous Caravaggist *Taking of Christ* in Boston (Fig. 20), demonstrates through a composition directly inspired by Caravaggio's painting of the subject the nature of the distraction that Caravaggio sought to avoid.

The beloved Apostle, who hours before was embraced by Christ, now flees, and in doing so he betrays his Lord while his Lord is embraced by the traitor. As Franco Mormando has amply shown, the kiss was understood in Early Modern Europe to have a special meaning in the early Christian community as a sign of unity.<sup>47</sup> Judas perverts this meaning, and the beloved Apostle betrays the Lover at the moment of that perversion. The kiss which signals the unity of the apostolic community, for a moment, shatters it. For Judas, John's flight is a vindication. In looking at Jesus, Judas seems to ask, now do you acknowledge me? In looking through Jesus to John he seems to wonder how his master could have so misplaced his affection.<sup>48</sup>

In the Church Fathers and later commentators,<sup>49</sup> indeed in the Gospels themselves, Judas is never seen with the psychological complexity that Caravaggio reveals. He either acts out of simple greed or under the influence of Satan. The amalgam of love, jealousy, hate, pride, and regret in

---

*Christian Art, The Passion of Christ*. Janet Seligman, trans., Greenwich, 1972, II: figs. 168-183. It is interesting to note that in Schiller's text (52), she identifies the young fleeing man as the author of the Gospel himself. Schiller here is ascribing to a very late identification, which I have only found in twentieth-century commentators (e.g., *The Abington Bible Commentary*, Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David Downey, eds., New York, 1929, 1118) and which is therefore irrelevant to Early Modern paintings.

<sup>47</sup> Mormando, "Just as Your Lips Approach the Lips of Your Brothers': Judas Iscariot and the Kiss of Betrayal," in Mormando, ed., 107-135.

<sup>48</sup> The meaning and importance of honor and its relation to retaliatory violence is a necessary background for understanding how Caravaggio might have sympathized with Judas' sense of injury of Christ's criticisms of his actions. See Elizabeth Cohen, "Honor and Gender in the Streets of Early Modern Rome," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXII/4, 1992; Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge, 1987.

<sup>49</sup> Roman B. Halas, *Judas Iscariot*, Washington, D.C., 1946.

Caravaggio's depiction are unimagined by these writers. To find such complexity of motivation revealed in a work of art it may be necessary to look forward to the nineteenth century novel. Caravaggio was lead to his psychological insights of his characterizations by the demands of the unprecedented realism of his art.

**The Figure on the Right.** The sort of personal investment of the artist that we find at the central action is deepened through the inclusion of the figure on the far right of the painting. This figure is an onlooker amidst the soldiers. Unlike them he does not wear armor. He lifts his head almost straining his neck to see and holds a lantern with a hand that rises above the rest of the activity of the painting (Fig. 21). Typically, Bersani and Dutoit<sup>50</sup> assert that there is ambiguity as to whose hand holds the lantern. They suggest that it is possible that the soldier furthest from the activity could be holding it. The relation of the hand to the position we must imagine for this figure's body, given the placement and angle the head and space taken by the figure near him, makes this impossible. But a less subtle indication is also included because Caravaggio (unlike Bersani and Dutoit) did not want any ambiguity about it. The hand holding the lamp has a cut sleeve which reveals a red lining; this same kind of sleeve is also visible on the far right edge of the picture as the arm of the onlooker. This lantern is not the painting's major source of light; this comes from outside the painting to the left. The lantern's warm glow shines only on the hand that holds it (Fig. 22), on the red robe of St. John and the hands of the soldiers that grasp it. Ever since Longhi first discovered a copy of this painting, the figure holding the lamp has been recognized as a self-portrait of Caravaggio.<sup>51</sup> The chalk portrait drawing by Ottavio Leoni (Fig. 23) has made possible the identification of Caravaggio's visage in a number of his paintings, most notably the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (Fig. 24) and the *David with the Head of Goliath* (Fig. 25). The head on the far right in the *Taking of Christ* possesses the proportions of the parts of the face, the roundedness at the end of and the bump in the middle of the nose, the setting of the eyes and eyebrows, and the cut of the beard, all of which make it clear that this darkly handsome face is the same one that Leoni drew. The apparent age of the man with the lantern agrees with Caravaggio's thirty-one years when the *Taking of Christ* was painted.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Bersani and Dutoit, 56.

<sup>51</sup> Longhi, 29-30. Philip Sohm, "Caravaggio's Deaths," *Art Bulletin*, LXXXIV/3, 2002, 459 feigns doubt that this is a self-portrait by saying that Longhi's identification has been accepted "with uncritical alacrity" but two paragraphs later, he himself asserts this identity, but listing it with other examples of Caravaggio's "auto-mimesis."



The painting illustrates accurately the Gospels, which say that a crowd came with torches and arms. In other words, some were armed and some were not, but all were part of the same dangerous mob. Is Caravaggio, although unarmed in his self-depiction, implicating himself by putting himself in this crowd? He doesn't lay a hand on John or Christ; he, instead, as David Stone described it, is "craning his neck and holding up a lantern to the darkness."<sup>53</sup> There is a sense that this figure is part of the crowd yet also apart from it; he seems swept there perhaps by curiosity and not malevolence. If the painter's presence as witness is granted, his contrast to the fleeing John has a particular significance.

That these two figures bracket the scene, one on the far right, the other on the far left, is obvious. Both have brightly illuminated faces in profile and visible raised right hands. The contrast in their attitudes is equally obvious. John is fleeing open mouthed as if screaming in terror. Caravaggio is entering the scene. One tries to get away and not see, the other to be there and to see. Paradoxically, the saint who is the friend of Christ wants to get away, while Caravaggio, known by all, including himself, to be a great sinner, wants to be with Christ. The paradox disappears before the knowledge that Caravaggio, a millennium and a half after Christ's death, knows more about Christ's nature and fate than his beloved contemporary. At the time of the arrest, John knows Christ's teaching, had witnessed miracles and the Transfiguration, had heard veiled prophecies of the

---

<sup>52</sup> Caravaggio's placement of his own visage is complex because of the variety of personae he assumes in his own paintings. Showing himself as the severed head of Goliath held by a handsome young David, we are likely to ask if the artist is presenting himself as a victim or as one who, like the Philistine giant, was deserving of the severest punishment. It is very different when he shows himself as the object of the viewer's erotic attention, as in the *Sick Bacchus*. Then, in some of the early genre paintings, he appears looking out and making eye contact with the viewer, both to call our attention to the scene and to separate himself from it. In the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, the *Taking of Christ*, and the *Martyrdom of St. Ursula*, Caravaggio is a witness embedded within the place of action. In the *Matthew*, he seems merely to have stumbled on the scene, while in the other two, his presence is obviously willed. This variety of self-depictions makes difficult an over-arching interpretation for its occurrence. David Stone's argument that his self-portraits are used as a means of fashioning public identity grants that these personae are self-contradictory and create a complex whole. See David Stone, "In *Figura Diaboli*: Self and Myth in Caravaggio's *David and Goliath*," in *From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts, ca. 1550-1650*, Pamela M. Jones and Thomas Worcester Leiden, eds., 2002, 19-43. Michael Fried's analysis of some of the self-portraits as referring covertly to the act of painting is consistent with my view of the *Taking of Christ*, but it doesn't explain all of the self-portraits. See Michael Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio," *Critical Inquiry*, 24, 1997, 13-56. Certainly Philip Sohm is correct that the self-portraits are symptomatic of a narcissistic personality. See Sohm, 449-468. I would venture further and suggest that Caravaggio's narcissism is prophetic of the emergence of a syndrome of narcissism, symptomatic of the modern condition. For a psychological perspective on Caravaggio's pathological personality, see S. Gioria Shoham, "Caravaggio: The Violent Enlightenment," *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, VI/3, 1999, 67-82.

<sup>53</sup> Stone, 38.

Resurrection but he had not yet been witness to the resurrected Christ. His fear, like Peter's later denial, signifies the ignorance and doubt of Christ's followers before the resurrection. Caravaggio's personal knowledge of Christ cannot compare to John's but his knowledge of Christ's significance exceeds John's at the time of the arrest. Caravaggio has no reason to fear, because he knows that Christ will rise from the dead and offer salvation to those who believe in him.

The question of Caravaggio's spirituality has been addressed often since Friedlaender's landmark study.<sup>54</sup> Usually what is discussed is the extent to which Caravaggio was influenced by the competing religious societies that were in ascendancy in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy. Oratorian, Jesuit, and Franciscan threads have all been convincingly revealed,<sup>55</sup> but the tenor of Caravaggio's belief is another, more important, matter. The depiction of himself as such an eager witness to Christ's passion argues for the intensity of his belief when this painting was created. More than mere belief, his relation to St. John shows a conviction about his own role in the propagation of the faith.

The contrast of fear and desire in John and Caravaggio, respectively, is implied by the placing of each of their visible, left eyes at equidistance from the edge of the painting that each is closest to. This measurement is reliable: there is no evidence that the painting was ever cut down,<sup>56</sup> and it is also consistent with old copies of the picture. It is not the whole eye that is in this relation to the edge; it is the front of the eye. According to optical theories of the late sixteenth century,<sup>57</sup> it is in the front of the eye within the crystalline lens where the power of sight resides. The artist was careful to place the effective part of the organ of sight of both characters in a relation to the picture's composition that elicits a comparison of what each chooses to see. In both figures the left hands are hidden and the right hands are prominent, highlighting the effective member of each—the writing hand of the Evangelist and the painting hand of the artist; the paralleling of the two figures is thus further made explicit.

---

<sup>54</sup> See "Caravaggio's Character and Religion," in Friedlaender, 117-129.

<sup>55</sup> These arguments are summarized by Joseph F. Chorpensing, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion," *Artibus et Historiae*, VIII/16, 1987, 149-148. See also John Varriano, "Caravaggio and Religion," in Mormando, ed., 191-207; Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences in Caravaggio's Painting" in Mormando, ed., 208-235.

<sup>56</sup> Benedetti, "Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ*, a Masterpiece Rediscovered," *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXV/10888, 1993, 737.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art*, New Haven, 1990, 79-81; David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, Chicago and London, 1976., Ch. 8.

The trajectory of John's flight out of the picture is a mirror of the trajectory of Caravaggio's entrance. If their angles of exit and entry are extended through the picture, they seem to reach outward toward the viewer from the face of John, through Christ's face across Judas' shoulder to the reflective glare on the most prominent of the armored figures back to the face of the second soldier, and through to Caravaggio's self-portrait. The three dimensional grouping of the dense mass of activity swells out at the center of the image like a section of a large globe.<sup>58</sup> If the trajectories of flight and arrival are extended beyond the edge of the painting then there is an implication of the completion of this globe so that the flight of the Apostle converges through a great circle with the entrance of the painter. The intimation of a global reality beyond the confines of the painting recalls Christ's charge to the Apostles to "go into the whole world" to preach and baptize. This commission would have had special resonance at a time when the Church's missions were extending far into the New World, Asia, and Africa. For the Counter-Reformation, this resonance would only be magnified by the early Protestants' questioning the value of missions: the early reformers doubted the relevance of the charge to the Apostles in the post-apostolic period. The doctrine of pre-destination made the efficacy of converting the heathen questionable and the doctrine of justification by faith meant that good works, like that of a Christian missionary, have no relevance to Christian salvation. Furthermore, the questioning of hierarchy within the Church also undermined the existence of an authority that could order missions into the world. Inspired by the negative example of the Protestants, as well as by the discovery of new souls to save, Roman Catholics, especially the Dominicans and Franciscans, renewed missionary activity with newfound zeal.<sup>59</sup> Under Paul III, Jesuit missions were developed. Inspired by Jesuit leadership, Pius V created the Congregation for the Conversion of Pagans (1568). Gregory XIII created the Congregation for Oriental Affairs, and under Gregory XV, the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith was founded with the purpose of administering and promoting missions.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Benedetti, 1993, 730, relates the gesture of the fleeing St. John to reliefs of ecstatic bacchantes. The example he illustrates moves over the rounded corner of a sarcophagus; if indeed this is an inspiration for Caravaggio's painting, the swelling surface of the relief would also have suggested Caravaggio's volumetric grouping of the figures in the painting. Also relevant is an even more globe-like depiction of bacchantes that was known in the late sixteenth century, the Pitti Vase.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph Schmidlin, *Catholic Mission History*, Techny, 1933.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-266. See also *idem*, *Catholic Mission Theory*, Techny, 1931, 11-13 for an overview of Counter-Reformatory writing that promotes missions.

All three synoptic Gospels relate Christ's charge to the Apostles to preach to all nations, but in Mark's Gospel, Christ is more specific in listing how the faithful will be recognized. Most of the signs are common to the lives of all the Apostles: they shall cast out devils, speak in tongues, take up serpents, lay hands on the sick, and cure them. Only one sign became particular to the legend of one Apostle alone: "if they shall drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them" (Mark 16:18). It is told in the *Golden Legend* that John when preaching was given poison by a high priest, and he was unharmed.<sup>61</sup> It is for this that John is often depicted holding as his attribute a cup of poison (Fig. 26). Peter's surprising absence from Caravaggio's composition not only allows the eye to see more clearly John's flight, but also lets the mind attend more sharply to the future apostolic mission. John is the Apostle who can best represent this because he alone of the twelve was believed to be explicitly alluded to in Christ's charge through the foretelling of the immunity to poison. The allusion to the charge to the Apostles as told in Mark's Gospel is consistent with an attention to this Gospel in the paintings commissioned by the Mattei brothers. As Gilbert has noted, both the fleeing youth in the *Taking* and Christ's appearance "in another shape" (Mark 16:12) in the *Supper at Emmaus* are details found only in Mark. Perhaps, as Gilbert suggests, one of the Mattei, most likely the cardinal, had a particular interest in Mark's Gospel.<sup>62</sup>

If the outward movement of the fleeing John is linked to the later charge to the Apostles to preach to the world, then the comparison made in the painting of John and Caravaggio becomes intelligible. The desertion of Christ by the Apostles makes possible their later efforts at proselytizing. The spread of the Christian message begins with the Apostles but in the seventeenth century it is continued, in part, by painters. Loyola's exercises and Franciscan piety both emphasize the importance of the visual imagination in devotional practice. The use of images for instruction and devotion was not only sanctioned by the Church but, in its iconophilia, was overtly Counter-Reformatory. The Council of Trent decreed that "great profit is derived from all holy images and may encourage the faithful 'to adore and love God and cultivate piety'."<sup>63</sup> This was reiterated with even greater stress by the art theorist Armenini in 1587, only fifteen years before Caravaggio

---

<sup>61</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, William Granger Ryan, trans., Princeton, New Jersey, 1993, I, 50-55.

<sup>62</sup> Gilbert, 152.

<sup>63</sup> Session XXV, "Decree on the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints and/or Sacred Images," *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, H. J. Schroeder, trans., Rockford, 1978. For an overview of post-Tridentine art theory, see Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1480-1600*, Oxford, 1978, 103-136.

completed the *Arrest of Christ*. Armenini wrote that through images, "the illiterate come to know the true and direct path to their salvation... [through images the faithful] are moved to increased piety and to devotion and in the end, to reverence, all of which are excellent remedies and means for their salvation."<sup>64</sup> Christ himself, according to Armenini, sanctioned holy images by granting the image of his face onto Veronica's veil:

He himself was pleased to leave as the image of the true countenance of His Holy Divine face painted in immortal colors on a simple veil, a truly great and stupendous miracle for the whole world... And let that cloth be shown to the confusion of the wretched heretics who blame such an art and wickedly twist the meaning of the fervent and sincere devotion shown for painted images of the holy church with so much affection by us faithful Catholics.<sup>65</sup>

A frontal image of Christ's sorrowful face unavoidably alludes to Veronica's veil; in doing so, the picture under discussion links Caravaggio's own art to Christ's sanction of images for which Armenini argues. The allusion to Veronica's veil is inextricable from the role of artists in the work of the global mission of the post-Tridentine church. The image of Christ's face was one of the most popular subjects for paintings that were made for export to New World and Asian missions. These straight-forward, conservative depictions were of course based on Veronica's veil. Sigismondo Laire, one painter who became wealthy mass-producing this kind of small devotional painting for the missionary market, was part of Caravaggio's circle of friends.<sup>66</sup>

According to Counter-Reformatory thought, Caravaggio as a painter of Christian images has a function in propagating the faith, and he is thus in the lineage of Christian preaching that begins with the Apostles. By formally pairing himself with John in the composition of the painting, Caravaggio is asserting this role of the artist in the Church's mission of spreading the faith. The dim lantern he holds is a simile for the effort of his imagination to recreate what he cannot really see. His light falls on his own right hand, the instrument of his art. Kristina Herrmann Fiore suggests that the witnessing

---

<sup>64</sup> Giovanni Battista Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, Edward J. Olszewski, trans., New York, 1977, 106.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>66</sup> Gauvin Alexander Bailey, "Creating a Global Artistic Language in Late Renaissance Rome: Artists in the Service of Overseas Missions, 1542-1621," in Jones and Worcester, eds., 118-136.

of Caravaggio holding the lantern is a recollection of “the ideas that the artist’s task is that of enlightenment [as] articulated in the writings of Dürer, Benvenuto Cellini, Lomazzo and others.”<sup>67</sup> Fiore also notes that the association of the artist and lamp was current in Caravaggio’s Rome where Federico Zuccaro “proposed a lantern as the emblem [for the Accademia di S. Luca] and used the term *lanternini* to refer to its members.”<sup>68</sup> The relevance of Fiore’s insight is deepened if the figure of Caravaggio is accepted to be a counterpart to the fleeing St. John. Through the acts and writing of the Apostles, Caravaggio sees what through his painting he shows. John’s flight and that of the other Apostles made it possible for Caravaggio to know the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice. The contrast between the beloved and the treacherous Apostles in Caravaggio’s painting reflects the tragic drama of Christ’s betrayal, while the parallels between the fleeing Apostle and the entering artist foretell the ultimate triumph of the Church. Does any other painting depict a particular moment so that the significance of that moment’s projection into future history is, at the same time, so fully revealed?

Anthony Apesos is Professor of Fine Arts at The Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University. He is the author of *Anatomy for Artists: A New Approach to Discovering, Learning and Remembering the Body* (North Light Books, 2007).

---

<sup>67</sup> Fiore, 25-26.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



Fig. 1. Caravaggio, *Taking of Christ*, 1602, Dublin Society of Jesus, on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland (Photo: Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland).



Fig. 2. Giotto, *Taking of Christ (Kiss of Judas)*, 1305, Padua, Arena Chapel (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 3. Barna da Siena, *Taking of Christ*, c. 1350, Collegiata, San Gimignano, Collegiata (Photo: Scala Archives).

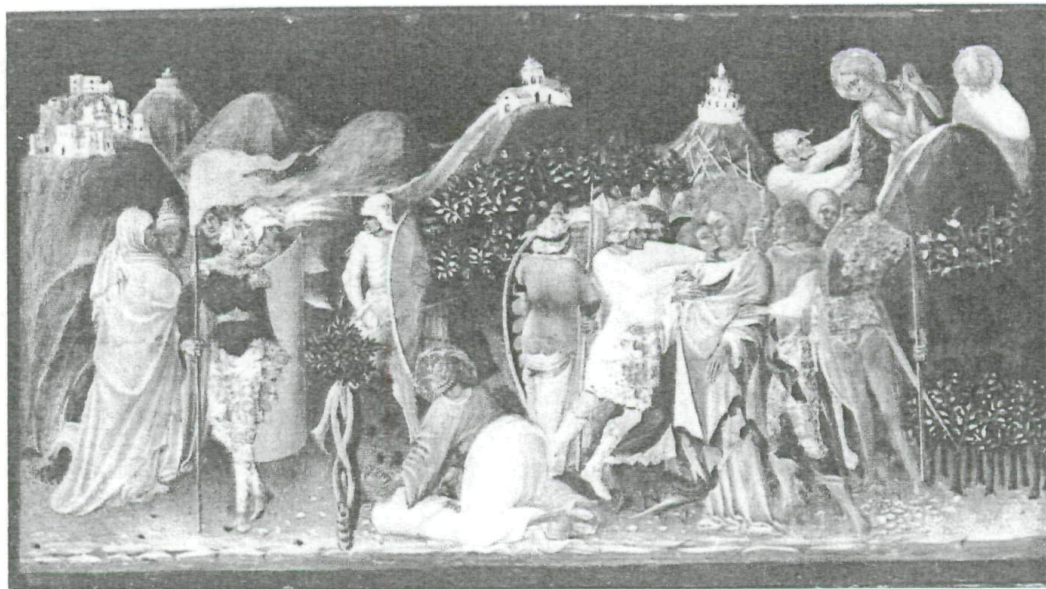


Fig. 4. Bartolommeo di Tomasso, *Taking of Christ*, c. 1425, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gwynne Andrews Fund 1958.58.87.1 (Photo: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).



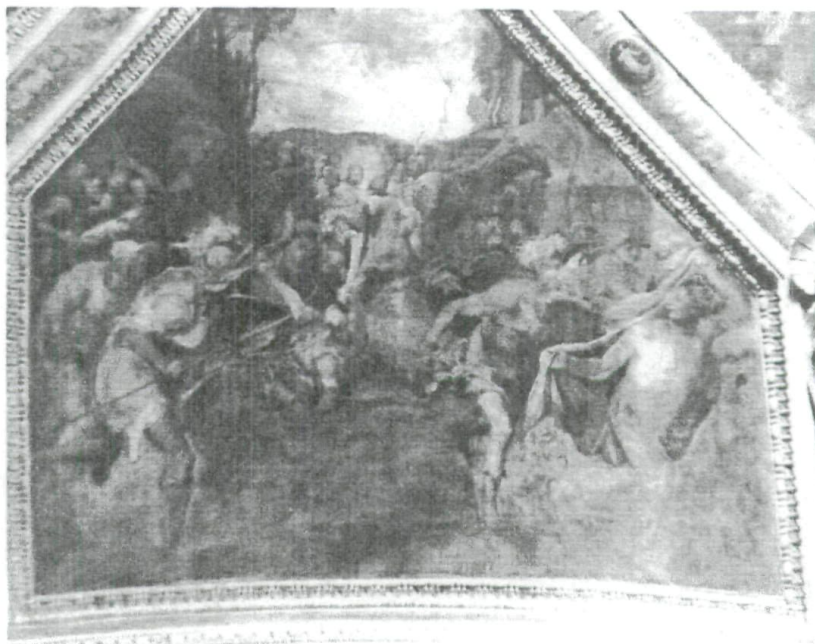


Fig. 5. Taddeo Zuccaro, *The Betrayal of Christ*, 1556, Rome, S. Maria della Consolazione (Photo: Author).



Fig. 6. Giuseppe Cesari (Cavaliere d'Arpino), *The Betrayal of Christ*, 1596, Rome, Galleria Borghese (Photo: Rome, Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Romano, Gabinetto Fotografico).



Fig. 7. Anonymous, *Taking of Christ*, c. 1575, Rome, Oratorio di S. Lucia del Gonfalone (Photo: Rome, Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Romano, Gabinetto Fotografico).



Fig. 8. Copy after Correggio, *Young Man Fleeing from the Capture of Christ*, c. 1525, Columbus Museum of Art (Photo: Columbus Museum of Art).



Fig. 9. Albrecht Dürer, *Taking of Christ*, 1508, from the engraved Passion Series (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 10. Albrecht Dürer, *Taking of Christ*, 1510, from the Large Passion Series (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 11. Taddeo Zucarro, *Agony in the Garden*, 1556, Rome, S. Maria della Consolazione (Photo: Author).



Fig. 12. Garofalo, *Ascension of Christ*, c. 1520, Rome, Galleria Barberini (Photo: Rome, Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Romano, Gabinetto Fotografico).



Fig. 13. Massimo Stanzione, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1630, Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art (Photo: Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art).



Fig. 14. Jacob Jordaens, *The Four Evangelists*, c. 1625, Paris, Louvre (Photo: Scala Archives).

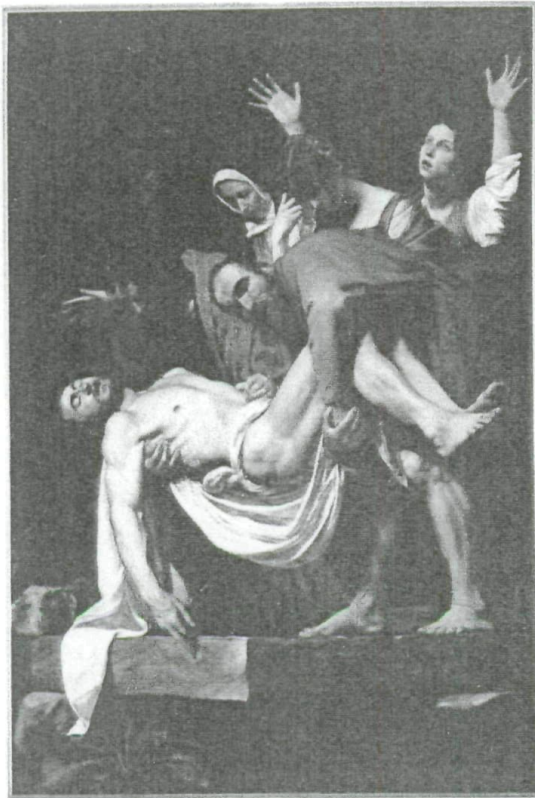


Fig. 15. Caravaggio, *Entombment*, 1604, Vatican, Pinacoteca (Photo: Scala Archives).

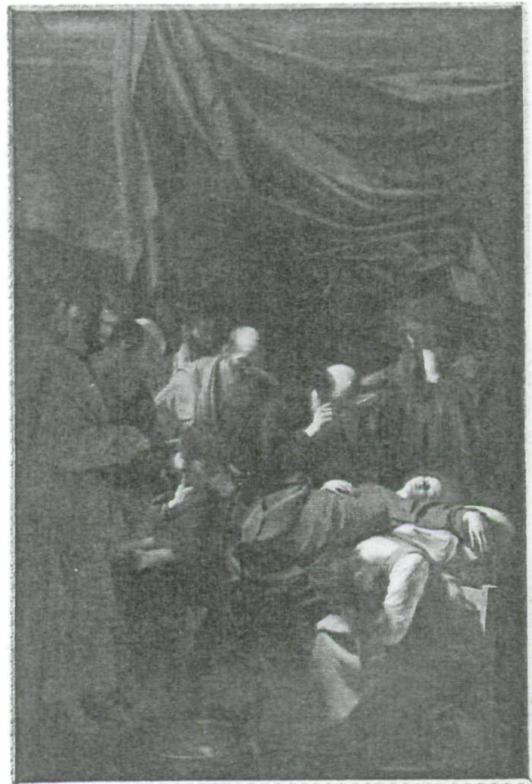


Fig. 16. Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, 1601-1603, Paris, Louvre (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 17. Albrecht Dürer, *Four Apostles Diptych*, left panel showing Sts. John and Peter, 1526, Munich, Alte Pinakothek (Photo: Scala Archives).

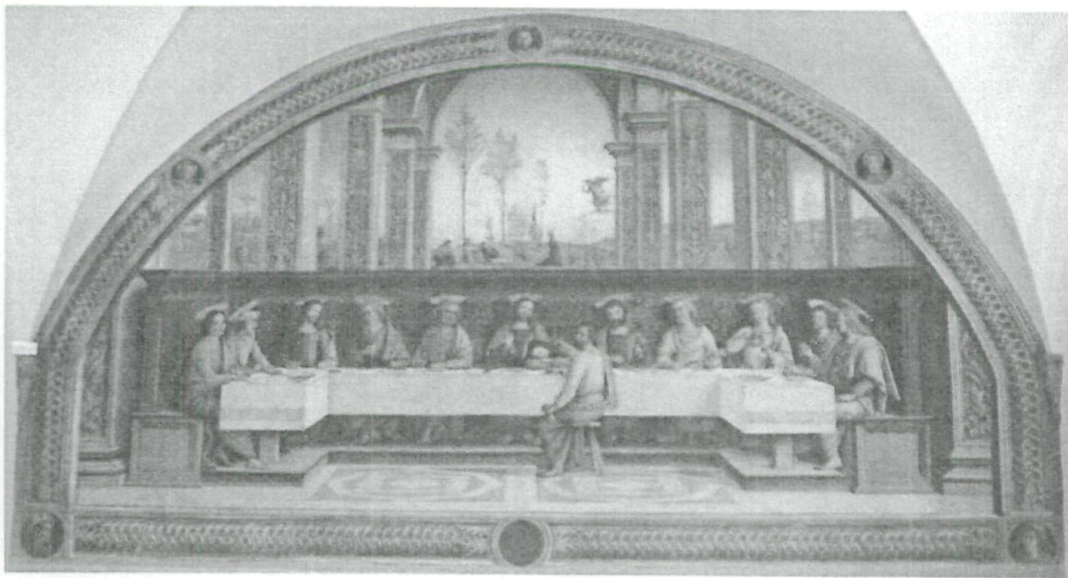


Fig. 18. Pietro Perugino, *Last Supper*, c. 1495, Florence, S. Onofrio (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 19. Caravaggio, *Taking of Christ*, Detail, 1602, Dublin Society of Jesus, on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland (Photo: Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland).



Fig. 20. Anonymous, *Taking of Christ*, c. 1620, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Photo: Boston, Museum of Fine Arts).

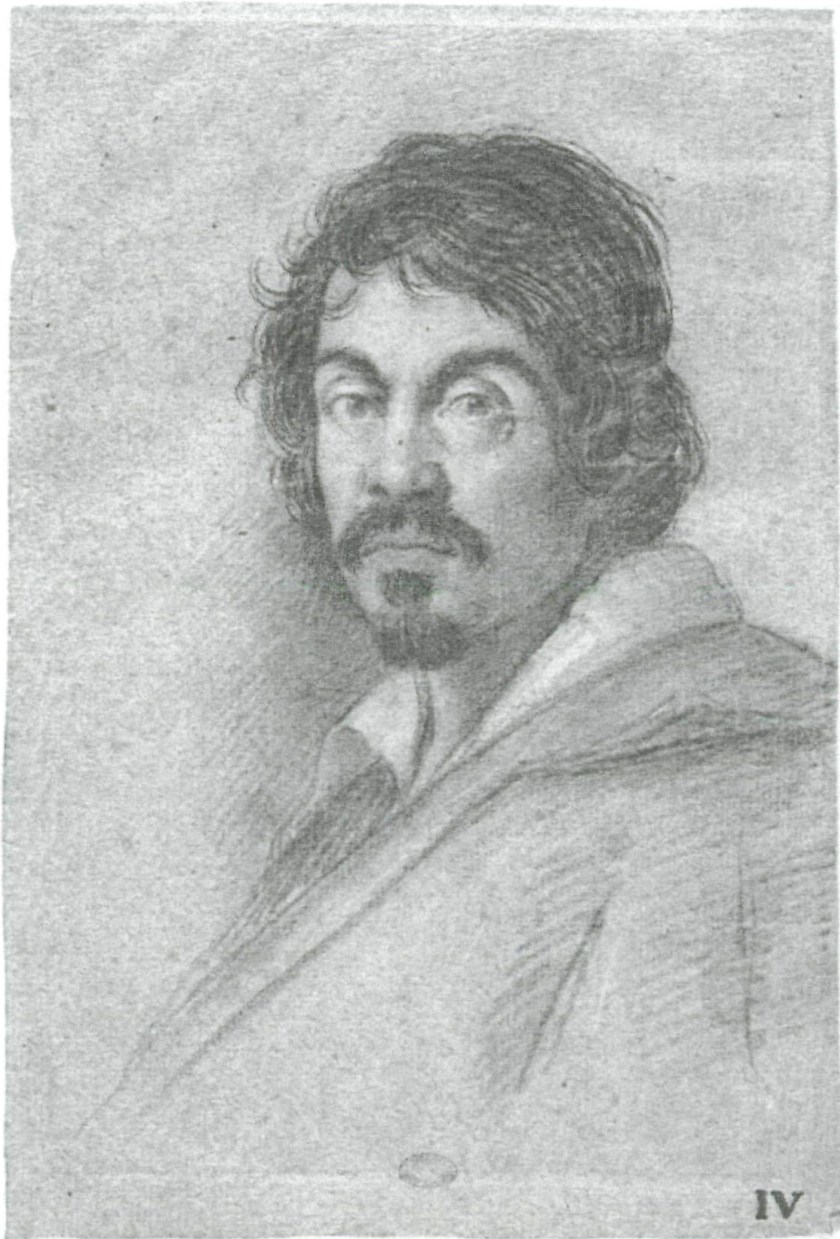




Fig. 21. Caravaggio, *Taking of Christ*, Detail, 1602, Dublin Society of Jesus, on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland (Photo: Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland).



Fig. 22. Caravaggio, *Taking of Christ*, Detail, 1602, Dublin Society of Jesus, on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland (Photo: Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland).



*Michelangelo da Caravaggio*

Fig. 23. Ottavio Leoni, *Portrait of Caravaggio*, c. 1625, Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 24. Caravaggio, *Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, 1600, Detail, Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi (Photo: Scala Archives).

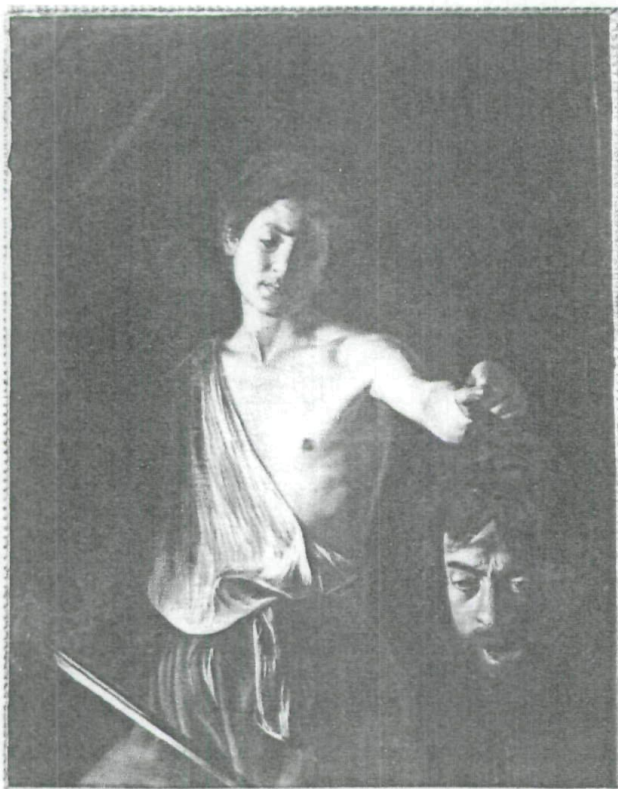


Fig. 25. Caravaggio, *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1610, Rome, Galleria Borghese (Photo: Scala Archives).



Fig. 26. Alonzo Cano, *St. John the Evangelist*, c. 1650, Paris, Louvre (Photo: Scala Archives).

Copyright of Aurora: The Journal of the History of Art is the property of Aurora: The Journal of the History of Art and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.