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SUN–SYMBOLISM AND COSMOLOGY IN MICHELANGELO'S *LAST JUDGMENT*

Valerie Shrimplin Evangelidis

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1991

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Vallie Shiphi Dafficks

(Name of Candidate)

6th day of March, 1971.

Abstract

Although the perception of the design of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as dependent upon a basically circular composition around the figure of Christ has generally been observed in the literature, no satisfactory explanation of this has been presented. In the following hypothesis, a cosmological interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* proposes new sources for the circular design of the fresco around a central Apollonian Sun–Christ.

After an outline of the basic nature of the problem, an examination of earlier examples of the *Last Judgment* demonstrates the cosmological associations of the traditional iconography of the subject, primarily related to the hierarchical implications of the 'flat–earth theory,' which places Heaven above and Hell beneath the earth's surface. Close formal analysis of Michelangelo's own version of the *Last Judgment*, which emphasizes the innovative aspects of its organisation, is then followed by an assessment of various existing interpretations of the work. In then examining the type of sources which appear likely to have contributed to the final programme of the work, different areas of religious, literary and philosophical material are brought under consideration.

In order to resolve the meaning of the fresco's iconography and composition, the influences upon Michelangelo of the Catholic religion and Reform thought, of the writings of Dante, and of Florentine Neoplatonism have been examined in an entirely new way, from a cosmological point of view, which brings to light their common emphasis on the Sun as a symbol of the Deity. A new area of potential source material, that of contemporary scientific cosmology, has also been considered. Prevailing knowledge of Copernicus' theory of the Sun–centred universe, hitherto dismissed as a possible direct influence by renowned writers like Charles de Tolnay, on the grounds of chronology, is specifically discussed and found to be securely documented in Vatican circles at the time of the commission. Thus the sources finally proposed for the overall theme of Sun–symbolism and Cosmology in the fresco are found to be dependent

upon the common ground shared between the Catholic Reformation revival of the traditional Christian analogy between the Deity and the Sun, the Neoplatonic cult of Sun–symbolism, literary sources in Dante and the scientific theory of heliocentricity, as developed by Copernicus.

Against this background of the History of Ideas in the Renaissance period, consideration of art historical methods leads to the suggestion of a newly proposed Biblical source for the fresco and, finally, discussion of the deductive method of art historical interpretation suggests the broader implications of the hypothesis, both for the life and work of Michelangelo himself as well as for the sixteenth–century context of the fresco's creation.

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Preface

> Michelangelo has imitated those great philosophers who hid the greatest mysteries of human and divine philosphy under a veil of poetry that they might not be understood by the vulgar.
>
> Pietro Aretino on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.[1]

Contemporary comment by Pietro Aretino on Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel indicates an awareness of hidden symbolic meaning in the fresco soon after the time of its completion and unveiling in 1541. Explanation of these 'most profound allegorical meanings, understood by few'[2] and the identification and relative importance of the various Biblical and literary sources which Michelangelo might have used for the *Last Judgment* continues to be a matter of major controversy. The question remains as to whether the hidden symbolism of the fresco and the meaning of its thematic deviations from the norms of Last Judgment iconography might ever be fathomed by any one except the artist – and especially at a distance of around four hundred and fifty years.

Problems of art historical interpretation are concerned with the innate meaning of a work of art in the context of its time and place of creation. Difficulties arise as the attempt is made to determine the intention of the artist and possible underlying meaning in the work by means of an elaborate reconstruction of the various sources and influences which had contemporary significance and which might have contributed to the formation of his thinking. No single source of religious, philosophical or cultural influence may be argued for Michelangelo's Sistine *Last Judgment*, but the attempt must be made to consider the broad spectrum of the complex prevailing theories and ideas of his age, which

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[1]L. Dolce, *L'Aretino*, quoted and discussed by E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 189 and D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 20.

[2]Lodovico Dolce on *Michelangelo's Last Judgment*, also quoted and discussed, *ibid.*

duly contributed to the multiple layered intention of the fresco's final programme.

An interdisciplinary appr[illegible] to the art historical problem of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* may thus shed new light on the work in question as well as increasing our understanding of the artist himself. As Panofsky and Gombrich among others have pointed out, it is important to remain wary of the dangers of reading too much into a work or of forcing it into a pre–determined scheme.[3] The writer should always consider the extent to which the interpretation is in keeping with the known personality and tendencies of the master, and also remain aware of the difference between what may be regarded as hypothesis and what may be regarded as truth.[4] On the other hand, it can also be unwise to accept unquestioningly the traditional interpretations of famous works and simply reiterate the usual platitudes.

After examining the background to *Last Judgment* iconography in general and the various existing interpretations of Michelangelo's fresco in particular, consideration of the type of sources which appear likely to have contributed to the final programme of the work, has embraced many areas of religious, literary and philosophical material. A major problem of this approach, which is more broadly concerned with the History of Ideas, was that each of these sections or chapters could, quite literally, have been developed into a separate thesis.[5] The problem was more often one of deciding what to omit rather than what to include. In addition, as the discussion ventured into other disciplines, the attempt was made

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[3]For discussion of the problems of this type of art historical interpretation, see E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 3–32 and E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1985, pp. 1–25.

[4]These concepts will be further discussed in the course of this thesis, especially in the concluding sections.

[5]The following publications by the author have emanated from the present study: 'Michelangelo and Nicodemism: The Florentine *Pietà*,' *Art Bulletin*, 71 (1), March 1989, pp. 58–66; 'Once More, Michelangelo and Nicodemism,' *Art Bulletin*, 71 (4), Dec. 1989, pp. 693–694; 'Sun–symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 21 (4), 1990 (39 page summary of thesis). Two further papers have been submitted: 'Hell in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' and 'The Centre of the Universe in Dante's Cosmology.'

to be as thorough as possible within the constraints of a single thesis, although the study is to be considered, in the end, as primarily art historical. The main viewpoint remains that of an art historian rather than theologian, historian, philosopher, or still less a scientist, but an interdisciplinary, sixteenth-century outlook has been assumed as far as this is possible.

Sincere thanks must go to Professor Elizabeth Rankin for being a most constructively demanding supervisor and for her valuable criticism and suggestions; also to various colleagues and members of other departments for reading through different chapters, where I have ventured into other fields of specialization. Assistance received from libraries, museums and art galleries in Rome, Florence, London, Cambridge, Munich and Bayonne, as well as in South Africa, is duly acknowledged, and has been specifically mentioned in the footnotes where relevant. I am particularly grateful to the Vatican authorities for permission to visit the Sistine Chapel and view the restorations from the scaffolding in 1989. Special thanks are due to Dr. E. A. Evangelidis. A research grant from the University of the Witwatersrand and the financial assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council are also gratefully acknowledged.

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108 Sandro Botticelli, illustration to *Paradiso* XXVI, detail, 1480s–1497. Silverpoint/pen and ink on parchment, 320 x 470mm. (sheet), Staatliche Museen, East Berlin.

Clark, *Botticelli*, p. 207.

109 Giovanni di Paolo, *Beatrice and Dante hover before Christ within the Heaven of the Primum Mobile*, illustration to *Paradiso* XXVII, mid–fifteenth century. Miniature, 320 x 221mm. (sheet), British Museum (Yates Thompson 36, 178r), London.

Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, fig. 503b.

110 Sandro Botticelli, illustration to *Paradiso* XXVII, detail, 1480s–1497.

Silverpoint/pen and ink on parchment, 320 x 470mm. (sheet), Staatliche Museen, East Berlin.

Clark, *Botticelli*, p. 209.

111 Giovanni di Paolo, *Heaven of The Primum Mobile, with God in the Centre*, illustration to *Paradiso* XXXVIII, mid–fifteenth century. Miniature, 320 x 221mm. (sheet), British Museum (Yates Thompson 36, 170r), London.

Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, fig. 506a.

112 Pietro Buonaccorsi, Diagram of *Paradiso*, from *Il cammino di Dante*, Florentine, c. 1440. Tinted schematic drawing, size not given, Biblioteca Ricc (1122, fol. 28r), Florence.

Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 1, fig. 130.

113 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Ficino, Landino and Poliziano*, (identified by Vasari), c. 1486. Fresco, detail from *Scenes in the Life of John the Baptist*, Sta Maria Novella, Florence.

Plumb, *Horizon Book of the Renaissance*, p. 164.

114 Raphael, *School of Athens*, detail of Plato, 1510–11. Fresco, base 770cm. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, Rome.

Chastel, *Arte e Humanismo*, fig. 156.

115 Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, detail, lower zone, showing area of Hell.

116 Detail, rear of nude figure in the Cave.

117 Detail, figures emerging from the Cave.

118 Detail, altar of the Sistine Chapel, in front of the Cave.

119 Unknown Sienese Master, *Hermes Trismegistus*, c. 1480. Mosaic pavement, Siena Cathedral.

Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, frontispiece.

120 Anonymous, *Portrait of Nicholas Copernicus*, sixteenth century. Panel, Private collection.

Bienkowska, *World of Copernicus*, opposite p. 96.

121 Giorgione, *Three Philosophers*, c. 1509–10. Canvas, 123.5 x 144.5cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, fig. 298.

122 Albrecht Altdorfer, *The Battle of Alexander*, detail, 1529. Wood panel, 158 x 120cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Benesch, *Art of the Renaissance in Northern Europe*, fig. 30.

123 Codex Graecus Monacensis 151, title page showing inscription, fifteenth century. Greek illuminated manuscript (presented by Clement VII to Albert Widmanstadt), dated '6.33,' Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Reproduced from photographic material supplied by the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

124 Detail of fig. 123.

125 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Confirmation of the Rule of St Francis*, detail showing nail holes, 1484–85, Fresco, Sassetti chapel, Sta Trinita, Florence.

Borsook and Offerhaus, *Sassetti and Ghirlandaio*, fig. S.

126 Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, detail, c. 1495–98. Wall–painting in oil tempera, 460 x 880cm., Refectory, Convent of Sta Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

Goldscheider, *Leonardo*, fig. 74.

127 Raphael, *Disputa* (*Disputation over the Sacrament*), 1510–11. Fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, Rome.

Hartt, *Italian Renaissance Art*, fig. 534.

128 Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, detail of Christ's thigh.

129 Gregor Reisch, *Margarita Philosophica*, detail, *The Human Body and the Signs of the Zodiac*, Freiburg, 1503. Engraving, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Heniger, *Cosmographical Glass*, fig. 87.

130 Photographic study of Sun and Cloud effects.

Photo: V. Shrimplin–Evangelidis.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> In the midst of all assuredly dwells the Sun. For in this most beautiful temple who would place this luminary in any other or better position from which he can illuminate the whole at once? Indeed, some rightly call Him the Light of the World, others, the Mind or the Ruler of the Universe: Hermes Trismegistus names him the visible God, Sophocles' Electra calls him the all–seeing. So indeed the Sun remains, as if in his kingly dominion, governing the family of Heavenly bodies which circles around him.
>
> Nicholas Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium.*[1]

Lines which could be construed as descriptive of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (fig. 1)[2] were in fact written by Nicholas Copernicus in his revolutionary heliocentric cosmology, published in 1543 (see diagram fig. 2). The idea that Michelangelo's equally revolutionary design for the traditional scheme of the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel (fig. 3) was an expression of the Copernican theory of the sun–centred universe was first considered by De Tolnay as early as 1940, in his paper, 'Le *Jugement Dernier* de Michel Ange. Essai d'Interpretation.'[3]

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[1]Nicholas Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (also referred to as *Revolutions*) Nuremberg, 1543, Book 1, chapter 10 (my translation). See facsimile edition, ed. J. Dobrzycki, London: Macmillan, 1978, vol. 1, p. 10 and vol. 2, p. 22 (this ed. referred to henceforth as Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*). Translation also available in T. S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 131; A. Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 33: J. L. E. Dreyer, *A History of Astronomy from Thales to Kepler*, New York, Dover, 1953, p. 328. The Latin text reads: 'In medio vero omnium residet Sol. Quis enim in hoc pulcherimo templo lampadem hanc in alio vel meliori loco poneret, quam unde totum simul posit illuminare. Siquidem non inepte quidam lucernam mundi, alii mentem, alii rectorem vocant. Trimegistus visibilem Deum, Sophoclis Electra intuente omnia. Ita profecto tanquam in solio regali Sol residens circum agentum gubernat Astrorum familiam.' See also fig. 2.

[2]Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Last Judgment*, fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome. 13.7 x 12.2m, 1533–41.

[3]C. de Tolnay, 'Le *Jugement Dernier* de Michel Ange. Essai d'Interpretation,' *Art*

Commenting on the fresco's remarkable deviation from usual Last Judgment iconography and composition,[4] De Tolnay's interpretation here concentrated upon his argument that Christ is unusually depicted in Michelangelo's fresco in the form of the pagan Sun–god Apollo. He is situated as if 'in the centre of a solar system...in the unlimited space of the universe.'[5]

In the final paragraph of this paper, De Tolnay suggested that the cosmic scheme seems to form an analogy with Copernicus' theory of heliocentricity in which the sun, rather than the earth, was situated in the centre of the universe. It seemed to De Tolnay that Michelangelo, in placing Christ in the form of a Sun–Apollo in the centre of a 'macrocosmic' view of the universe, had arrived in his own way at a vision of the universe which 'curiously corresponded' to that of Copernicus. According to De Tolnay, both Michelangelo and Copernicus had taken up the heliocentric hypothesis formulated in antiquity. In addition, by his representation of unlimited space in the fresco, Michelangelo, wrote De Tolnay, was anticipating the concept of the infinite universe as formulated later in the sixteenth century by men like Giordano Bruno.[6]

Subsequently, in 1960,[7] De Tolnay developed the theme which he had raised in this early paper. He again drew attention to his concept of the depiction of Christ in the form of a Sun–symbol and commented further on what he had viewed as a curious correspondence between Michelangelo's vision and that of Copernicus. De Tolnay expanded his hypothesis of the cosmological depiction of Christ as a

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Quarterly, 1940, pp. 125–146.

[4]*Ibid.*, pp. 125 and 141.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 142.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 144. The French text reads: 'Par le rôle primordial qu'il réserve au soleil dont le pouvoir magique commande l'unité du macrocosm, Michel Ange arrive, par ses voies propres, à une vision de l'univers qui correspond curieusement à celle de son contemporain Copernic. Tous deux, d'ailleurs, reprennent l'hypothèse heliocentrique formulée déjà dans l'Antiquité (Aristarque de Samos). Enfin, par sa conception de l'espace illimité, Michel Ange anticipe sur "l'univers infini" de Giordano Bruno.'

[7]C. de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 5 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943–60. Also C. de Tolnay, 'Michelangelo Buonarroti,' article in *Enciclopedia universale dell'arte*, vol. 10, Rome, 1962.

Sun–symbol but he now explicitly dismissed the possibility of any direct Copernican influence on Michelangelo on the grounds that the date of publication of Copernicus' theory post–dated the creation and completion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. In volume 5 of his definitive work on Michelangelo he wrote:

> By means of the central place which Michelangelo reserved in his composition for the Sun (Christ–Apollo) whose magic power determines the unity and the movement of his macrocosmos, the artist came of himself to a vision of the universe which, surprisingly, corresponds to that of his contemporary Copernicus. Yet he could not have known Copernicus' book which was published in 1543 – at least seven years after Michelangelo conceived his fresco.[8]

In the accompanying notes, he added his conclusion that 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is a heliocentric image of the macrocosmos *anticipating* the Copernican universe' [my italics].[9] He also commented that heliocentrism was 'rejected by the official theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.'[10]

Because of the apparent discrepancy which De Tolnay found between the dating of Copernicus' thesis and Michelangelo's fresco, he felt forced to dismiss the idea of direct Copernican influence on Michelangelo and implied only that Michelangelo 'of himself' came to the same conclusions as Copernicus and independently devised the heliocentric astronomical theory. De Tolnay therefore pursued the specifically Copernican and heliocentric argument no further but, unwilling to abandon his cosmological view of the 'Sun–Christ,' he looked elsewhere for explanations and sources and proceeded to develop an alternative, complex argument for this symbolic depiction of Christ. Considering the fresco in terms of a cosmological vision, his perception of the overall composition based on circles and circular movement around a central Sun–Christ was finally related to ancient astral myths and legends derived from pagan sources but also linked to certain Medieval

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[8]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 49.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 120.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 122.

concepts.[11]

Although De Tolnay's study of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* embraced many other aspects of the work,[12] his interpretation of the fresco as a cosmic view of the Sun–Christ remained his predominant theme. In his later (1975) summary publication of this extensive five volume work,[13] the major stress in the interpretation of the *Last Judgment* (chapter 4) is still placed on the circularity of the composition and its cosmological overtones. Describing the work as 'the grandiose vision of a heliocentric universe,'[14] he still appeared unwilling to dismiss the heliocentric idea as a force in the composition of the fresco, but, because of the discrepancy in dating with Copernicus' publication, he again reverted to the astral myths of antiquity to support his cosmological interpretation.[15] He gave little detailed explanation or further references for these ideas, however, but they are emphasized and proposed as source material for Michelangelo's fresco in the absence, in De Tolnay's opinion, of the possibility of a more direct *contemporary* cosmological basis for the work.

De Tolnay has been recognized as 'the great scholar whose work is the foundation of all modern Michelangelo scholarship'[16] and his interpretation of the *Last Judgment*, outlined above, has played a major part in the Michelangelo literature. His discussion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, from 1940 through to 1975, remained fundamentally cosmological, even though the possibility of any direct and concrete influence of contemporary sixteenth–century cosmology was discounted. His perception of the fresco as a cosmic drama and his assessment of the

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[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49. These sources will be more fully discussed below, chapter 4, section iv.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35. This includes, in particular, detailed examination of the various proposed Biblical and literary sources of the fresco's iconography.

[13] C. de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: Sculptor, Painter, Architect*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981 (1st ed. 1975).

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 60; cf. De Tolnay, *Jugement Dernier*, p. 143 and De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 48.

[16] J. W. Dixon, 'The Christology of Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 55 (3) Fall 1987, pp. 502–533, p. 506.

Apollonian Sun–Christ has continued to receive a great deal of attention and has exerted enormous influence on subsequent interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. The cosmological interpretation of the fresco is extremely important since it appears to have affected the majority of art historians since the 1940's. References to 'the cosmic design,' 'the circularity and circular motion' and 'the Apollo Sun–Christ' are legion.[17] De Tolnay's ideas soon permeated the Michelangelo literature of the 1940's and 50's;[18] in the 1960's similar interpretations and descriptions of the Sun–Christ and the 'cosmic' qualities of the fresco are common, also pervading the increasing amount of more popular works on Michelangelo.[19] More recent and detailed Michelangelo scholarship in the 1970's and 80's also continues to show an appreciation and consideration of De Tolnay's approach in discussion of the underlying significance of the *Last Judgment*.[20]

So many important modern authors have alluded to the cosmic overtones of Michelangelo's great fresco and for the most part the idea seems to have been generally assimilated. Yet few if any, however, have pursued this significant concept in any depth. Amongst the more well known, De Campos gave De Tolnay's theory some serious consideration[21] and Steinberg quite recently alluded to the Copernican theme, describing Christ as 'Copernican' in the course of his argument that the *Last Judgment* is actually heretical.[22] Only Salvini, it seems, has attempted to examine

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[17]Previous interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, with especial reference to these themes, will be fully examined in chapter 4, sections iii–v.

[18]For example, De Campos (1944), Von Einem (1959) and Wilde (1950's lectures, published 1960). Full details of these and other discussions will be given in chapter 4.

[19]These include authors like Schott (1963), Hartt (1965), Salmi (1965), Coughland (1966), and Camesasca (1969). See below chapter 4, section iv for details.

[20]Recent important scholarship concerning Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* includes the work of Hibbard (1975), Steinberg (1975 and 1980), Hall (1976), De Maio (1978), Salvini (1978), Liebert (1983) Murray (1984), De Vecchi in Chastel et al. (1986) and Lamarche–Vadel (1986). See below chapter 4, section v.

[21]D. Redig De Campos, *Michelangelo, The Last Judgment*, New York: Doubleday, 1978 (incorporating material from D. Redig de Campos and B. Biagetti, *Il Giudizio Universale di Michelangelo*, Milan, 1944), p. 89.

[22]L. Steinberg, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as Merciful Heresy,' *Art in America*, 63, 1975, pp. 49–63.

De Tolnay's theory critically.[23] Although he too referred to the fresco as 'cosmic,'[24] Salvini also dismissed the possibility of any direct Copernican influence on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, as well as De Tolnay's theory of Sun–symbolism in general, on the grounds that the sources argued by De Tolnay in ancient astral myths were too complex and too contrived and thus totally out of character with the artist whose schemes, says Salvini, tended rather towards themes of 'a simple magnificence.'[25] 'It is difficult', he says, 'to interpret the dark, desperate atmosphere of the *Last Judgment* in terms of any solar myth.'[26] In other words, De Tolnay's cosmological interpretation of the Sun–Christ is rejected *because the sources seem contrived.*

Although Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* has frequently been described as 'cosmic' in the broadest terms in art historical interpretation, little account has thus been taken of contemporary cosmological theory as it existed in the mid–sixteenth century. Cosmology is currently defined as 'The science or theory of the universe as an ordered whole and of the general laws which govern it. An account or system of the universe and its laws, a branch of metaphysics dealing with the world as a totality in space and time,'[27] and in our own times, its major usage is in the scientific context, where cosmology and astronomy are studied as distinct disciplines based on separate but related areas of physics and applied mathematics.[28] Cosmology, as an account of the physical universe, now represents the combination of observational

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[23]R. Salvini, chapter on 'Painting' in M. Salmi (ed.), *The Complete Works of Michelangelo*, New York: Reynal, 1965 especially p. 223 and R. Salvini, *The Hidden Michelangelo*, London: Phaidon, 1978, pp. 124–139.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 123.

[25]*Ibid.*, p. 131.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 132.

[27]*Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961 reprint, vol. 2, p. 1032.

[28]See, for example, the summary of developments in cosmology in C. W. Misner, K. S. Thorne and J. A. Wheeler, *Gravitation*, San Francisco: Freeman, 1973, pp. 752 – 762; and authors like J. Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947; H. Bondi, *Cosmology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960; and, more recently, F. Hoyle, *Astronomy and Cosmology*, San Francisco: Freeman, 1975, especially section 6 and P. Davies, *God and the New Physics*, London: Dent, 1983.

astronomy and theoretical physics, but this was manifestly not the case in the mid–sixteenth century. The modern definition of 'cosmology' as the study of the ordered universe has highly specialised scientific and mathematical overtones but in Michelangelo's time, as will be demonstrated, cosmology was regarded as inextricably linked with the disciplines of theology and philosophy rather than as an independent scientific study.[29] The separation of the various disciplines of cosmology, physics, mathematics, astronomy, religion and philosophy is a post seventeenth–century phenomenon.[30]

It is the contention of this thesis that cosmology, in the broad, sixteenth–century meaning of that term, provides a basis for an understanding of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. In order properly to reassess, therefore, the nature of the sources and influences which might have contributed to Michelangelo's final program of the fresco, and to re–examine the theory of a cosmological basis for its composition and iconography, it is essential to adopt a somewhat broader approach to the problem than that currently existing in the literature and to view it from an 'interdisciplinary' standpoint. The apparent portrayal of Christ in the form of a Sun–symbol should be examined in depth in relation both to its classical and Christian meaning. The loosely 'cosmological' approach to the fresco, emphasized by De Tolnay and followed for the most part by subsequent writers, requires accurate and specific examination within this 'interdisciplinary' sixteenth–century context. It is important to look at the work of art in the context of its time and place of creation and as a reflection of the ideas of the age as well as of the artist's own vision.

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[29]Differences between the earlier meaning and modern scientific concepts and usage are discussed, for example, in P. T. Landsberg and D. A. Evans, *Mathematical Cosmology, an Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1977, especially p. 25f., 'The relation of Cosmology to other subjects' and F. Hoyle, *From Stonehenge to Modern Cosmology*, San Francisco: Freeman, 1972.

[30]In Renaissance times, the idea of separating out world–view, theology, philosophy, science and even art was inconceivable. See A. Heller, *Renaissance Man*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, especially chapters 12 and 13; P. R. Ralph, *The Renaissance in Perspective*, London: Bell, 1974. For the Enlightenment, see E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951.

In order to assess the relevance of both traditional and 'new' ideas which were important to Michelangelo and his contemporaries, it will be necessary to 'reconstruct' as much as to 'discover' and to pursue many facets of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco, examining the sort of sources to which Michelangelo might have had access.[31] Firstly, as the fresco is situated on the altar wall in the most significant chapel in Christendom, it seems appropriate to begin with an examination of the relevant theological concepts, embracing, of course, the relationship between cosmology and theology. The theological view of the universe, its creation and disposition may be considered in general terms but special emphasis will be laid on the importance of the contemporary view within the context of the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century. As the theological importance of Sun–symbolism and cosmology is considered, the iconographical tradition of the Last Judgment scene and the possibility of its basis in cosmology requires discussion. Previous examples of the subject will be examined, on a comparative method, with especial reference to Italian versions of the two centuries prior to Michelangelo.

In addition to theology, contemporary philosophy will also be examined since its effect upon cosmology and world–view was highly significant; the links here between the two major themes of cosmology in the overall format and of Sun–symbolism in the figure of Christ are highly significant. The doctrine of Neoplatonism played a major role in the contemporary view of the universe in Renaissance Italy and also held particular interest for Michelangelo himself. Other sources for the Italian Renaissance view of the universe will include literary sources

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[31]The writings of Michelangelo's contemporary biographers, Condivi and Vasari may form a starting point for this. Ascanio Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo, 1553* (ed. H. Wohl) Oxford: Phaidon, 1976, is regarded as virtually dictated by Michelangelo. The second edition of Vasari's *Lives* was revised according to Michelangelo's influence (see T. S. R. Boase, *Vasari. The Man and The Book*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). In the absence of the standard Italian version by G. Milanesi, reference will be made to the recent edition of the translation by G. de Vere (Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, 1568*, trans. G. du C. de Vere, 3 vols., New York: Abrams, 1979). References will also be given to the abridged version, ed. G. Bull, for convenience (Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. G. Bull, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

of a type likely to have influenced the artist. Among these, the influence of Dante's writings on Michelangelo's works, which has already received some attention, will be further examined, as well as contemporary poetry including works by Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo himself.

Last, but perhaps most important of all, it will be necessary to consider the contemporary view of the cosmos from a scientific point of view. Here, the forerunners of Copernicus in the examination of the heliocentric theory will be considered, as well as Copernicus' own hypothesis and the precise chronology of his discoveries. Because of the theological significance of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, the attitude of the Church and the Papal patrons of the fresco to these philosophical and scientific concepts will be relevant, especially concerning the main heliocentric theory of Copernicus and the notion of it as heretical.

In this way, an elaborate reconstruction of ideas which were important and relevant to Michelangelo and his contemporaries may be built up. For the sake of convenience and clarity, these various aspects of the sixteenth–century total 'world–view' will be examined separately in the following chapters, but their interconnectedness will be at once apparent. Arguing from the basis thus formulated and using the fresco itself as the point of departure, it should be possible to deduce, anew, the underlying meaning and significance of Michelangelo's fresco.[32]

The identification and relative importance of the various different Biblical literary and philosophical sources which Michelangelo may have used for the *Last Judgment* continues to be a matter of major controversy. Alternative sources will be proposed in the pages that follow, in the light of new–found evidence, in order to support the argument that a cosmological interpretation of the fresco is a valid one and that Sun–symbolism and Copernican heliocentricity could be regarded as a

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[32]Art historical method which concerns the possibility of discovering the artist's intention by means of deductive processes in relation to history, philosophy and literature, which was established by Warburg, Panofsky and Gombrich, has recently been reconsidered by, among others, M. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, London: Yale University Press, 1985 and M. Roskill, *What is Art History?* London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.

major, overriding theme in the fresco. The sources to be proposed here are basically four–fold, but at the same time very much interlinked. They derive from the Catholic revival mid–century of Early Christian concepts which analogized Christ with the sun; Neoplatonic Sun–symbolism in the tradition of Ficino; the Italian literary tradition, especially Dante; and, lastly, the actual scientific theory of the heliocentric universe proposed by Copernicus who was, in turn, also strongly influenced by the first two themes.

While De Tolnay's cosmological interpretation of Christ as a Sun–symbol in the fresco does appear to have had some measure of validity, his argument was weakened by his references to the impossibility of Michelangelo's having known of heliocentric cosmology; hence the idea was never fully and seriously explored. This is now proved to be incorrect, for Michelangelo, nurtured on Neoplatonism and involved, at the time of the *Last Judgment* commission, in the Catholic revival of Early Christian themes was also quite definitely in a position to have heard of Copernicus' theory, as will be demonstrated below.

Chapter 2

Theology, Cosmology and Christian Iconography

> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void: and darkness was upon the face of the waters.
>
> Genesis 1:1–2.[1]

i) Cosmology and Religion

Before looking closely at the validity of a cosmological interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, it is necessary to assess the role which cosmology has played in the traditional iconography of this subject. This is dependent in turn upon the ancient relationship between cosmology and religion.

Man's changing view of the universe in which he lives has traditionally been connected with his spiritual and religious consciousness. From earliest times, the realms of theology and cosmology were regarded as contiguous as Man attempted to explain the universe and his own existence in spiritual and philosophical terms. This principle also applied, of course, to religions outside the Judaeo–Christian influence, as many other systems of belief, primitive or otherwise, also discuss or explain the existence of Man and the universe in spiritual terms. Creation myths of other religions, for example, also confirm the wide basis of the links between cosmology and theology, but are less relevant here.[2]

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[1]Biblical quotations are all taken from the Authorised version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated. Where detail is required for verses proposed as specific source material for Michelangelo, comparison will be made with the Latin Vulgate version.

[2]The close connection between theology and cosmology is made clear at once from the Bible in Genesis 1. For theological and historical discussion of the association, see, for example, A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936; J. L. E. Dreyer, *A History of Astronomy from Thales to Kepler*, New York: Dover, 1953, especially pp. 1–9, 'The earliest cosmological ideas.' More recently, W. Yourgrau and A. D. Breck, *Cosmology, History and Theology*, New York: Plenum, 1977; M. Wildiers, *The Theologian and his Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present*, New

The separation of cosmology as an independent scientific discipline is, as mentioned above, a relatively recent development, as men attempted to render explanations based on systematic knowledge of the laws of physics and mathematics rather than on metaphysical speculation. Within the Christian religion, however, world view, cosmology, philosophy and science were inextricably combined. Such concepts were of ancient Biblical origin and it is important to remember that the traditional linking of these concepts continued through the Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance periods. Until the beginning of the Age of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century there was little distinction between Biblical cosmology and any kind of scientific interpretation of the universe, for they were both dependent upon and derived from Biblical sources.[3] The importance of cosmology in the scriptural context is at once apparent for, to begin with, the origin and creation of the universe itself, and the idea of it as the handiwork of God is given pride of place in the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1. Cosmological concepts are also expressed in the all–important Nicene Creed of the Christian Church.[4] The theme of God as Creator or Builder of the universe is reinforced throughout the Bible, both symbolically and literally; references to 'the Lord that made Heaven and Earth' are very common.[5] Besides the theological interpretation of the creation of the universe, the Christian vision of the actual physical disposition of the universe

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York, Seabury, 1982; C. A. Russell, *Cross–currents, Interactions between Science and Faith*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1985. A. Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers. A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, Parts I and II, and G. Strachan, *Christ and the Cosmos*, Dunbar: Labarum, 1985, have discussed the way in which man has attempted to explain the creation and the order of the universe in spiritual terms.

[3]Works dealing with the separation and consequent conflict between religion and science after the seventeenth century include: J. W. Draper, *Religion and Science*, London: King, 1875; A. D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, New York: Dover, 1960, (1st ed. 1896); and B. Russell, *Religion and Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960 (1st ed. 1935).

[4]God is referred to as 'Maker of Heaven and Earth'. Note also references to Christ's *descent* into hell and *ascent* into heaven. *Book of Common Prayer*, London: Eyre and Spottiswode, n. d., p. 50.

[5]For example: Psalms 104, 115:15, 124:8, 134:3, 146:6, Isaiah 37:16, Jeremiah 10:12, 32:17, and in the New Testament: Acts 4:24, 14:15, Hebrews 3:4, Revelations 14:7.

was also derived from the Biblical evidence. Thus what is usually termed the 'flat-earth' view of the universe was dependent upon scriptural source material. The view of the stationary, flat earth, enclosed and surmounted by the canopy of Heaven, is based, for example, on such sources as Isaiah 40:22 which refers to the Lord who 'stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.'[6] Jerusalem was regarded as the centre of the flat-earth system, according to Ezekiel 5:5, and the stability of the earth was given theological and symbolic significance in the same way that the movement of the sun in its orbit around the earth also received scriptural support.[7]

The view of the Christian universe of the earth situated in a central position, with Heaven above it in the skies and Hell beneath the earth's surface, is very much reinforced throughout the Old and New Testaments. References to the idea of ascent into Heaven and, conversely, descent into Hell are far too numerous to list.[8] This physical description of the universe is easily perceived as very closely related to theological and philosophical concepts such as the ascent of the Christian by degrees towards God. Such concepts serve to demonstrate the very close relationship and interaction between the cosmological view of the universe and religious dogma. Christian cosmology was inextricably linked with theological meaning.

The parallels between the fixed ascending/descending arrangement of the universe and man's earthly existence, according to hierarchical schemes of Being, assumed major importance in the early Church. Hierarchical schemes of Being, which were derived from the arrangement of the cosmos, were based on the notion of ascent by degrees to God in Heaven, together with the opposing notion of descent into Hell. Such schemes were gradually codified and laid down by the

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[6]See also Isaiah 45:12, 51:13, 55:9 and Psalms 104:2.

[7]Psalms 104:5,19,22, and 119:90, mainly concerned with the concept of the immobility of the earth; see Joshua 1:12, Psalms 19:4f and Ecclesiastes 1:5 for the movement of the sun.

[8]For example: Genesis 28:12, Deuteronomy 4:39, II Kings 2:1, Psalms 14:2, 80:14, 103:11, 139:8, Isaiah 14:12,13, Daniel 4:13, Luke 24:51, John 1:32, Acts 1:11, I Thessalonians 4:16, I Peter 1:12 and Revelations 8:10, 10:1, 11:12.

early Church Fathers, passing into the official dogma of the early church. Writers from Augustine to Aquinas, too numerous to discuss in full here, have commented on the implications of cosmology and the scriptural evidence for God's creation and ordering of the universe. In an examination of the relevance of the direct links between scriptural cosmology and Christian iconography, perhaps the most influential writings on the hierarchical levels of existence in the real and celestial worlds were those drawn up by the writer known as Pseudo–Dionysius the Areopagite.[9] Although purporting to be the work of Dionysius, companion to St Paul in the first century, these writings have been dated to the early sixth century.[10]

In two important treatises, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* and *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,[11] Pseudo–Dionysius related the Christian cosmological world view to the ordering of the Church and Man on earth. These writings were influenced by the early Neoplatonic system of mystical theology concerning the scheme of Being in the universe. Pseudo–Dionysius' works demonstrated the relationship between the Christian doctrine of hierarchies and the cosmological hierarchies in the real world and achieved great authority in Medieval

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[9]Probably a Syrian monk (flourished c. 500), who is known only by his pseudonym. He wrote a series of Greek treatises and letters for the purpose of uniting Neoplatonic philosophy with Christian theology and mystical experience. His writings became of decisive importance for the theology and spirituality of both Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism. See E. Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, London: Collins, 1961 (1st ed. 1913), Introduction, *passim*, and J. Parker (ed.) *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, New York: Richwood, 1976. The continued importance of Pseudo–Dionysius into the Renaissance period, together with the idea of a correspondence between earthly and heavenly hierarchies has been demonstrated by O'Malley in his book on sermons given in the Sistine Chapel and St Peter's basilica, 1450–1521 (J. W. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1979, pp. 10–11, 107, 159, 161).

[10]Since they reveal the strong influence of the philosopher Proclus (d. 485) and the first reference to them dates from 532, they are almost certainly the work of a late fifth/early sixth–century monk, not the companion of St Paul (R. Huyghe, ed. *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Byzantine and Medieval Art*, London: Hamlyn, 1981, p. 18). The Rev. Parker is in the minority for proposing otherwise (Parker, *Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, vol. 2, pp. v–xx).

[11]Reprinted in Parker, *Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, Part 2, pp.1–66 and pp. 67–162. See Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 98f., for the 'immense influence' of these writings.

Christendom. The universe was shown as proceeding from God as a hierarchy ranging through several ranks of angels to Man and thence to the realm of organic creatures to, finally, the inorganic matter of the world. God is perceived as the source of the world, the Creator and Supreme Good from which all else issues forth.[12] Corresponding with the celestial hierarchy was the ecclesiastical hierarchy of God's church on earth. This consisted of the Sacraments, those who administered them (namely the members of the church disposed according to rank) and lastly the laity and penitents. The concept of hierarchy or ascent and descent by careful gradation, as demonstrated in the works of Pseudo–Dionysius, was the essence of the so–called cosmological Chain of Being and became standardized in both Eastern and Western Churches in the Middle Ages. The same concept, in turn, also closely underpinned Christian church iconography, as will be demonstrated.[13]

ii) Cosmology and Christian Iconography

The standard types of Christian hierarchical schemes, as expressed in the writings of Pseudo–Dionysius were, in turn, traditionally reflected and carried over into church architecture and decoration. Christian art and architecture were, in this way, very much linked to the official view of the universe and used doctrinally to reinforce the Christian hierarchical and cosmological precepts. This practice was common from the earliest Christian times and was related, again, to the Biblical examples. An important cosmological concept, for example, was the idea that the Holy Tabernacle, built by Moses and described in Exodus, chapters 25 to 27, corresponded to the same shape as the cosmos. The Tabernacle was rectangular and twice as long as it was wide: the earth was held to be of the same

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[12] *On the Heavenly Hierarchy*, Caput 1, sections 1 and 2.

[13] See Mâle, *Gothic Image*, p. 8f., and Lovejoy, *Chain of Being*, *passim*, for the widespread nature of this notion. The entry 'Cosmology and Cartography' in *Encyclopedia of World Art*, 16 vols. London: McGraw Hill, 1964, vol. 3, pp. 836–864, contains useful discussion of 'Cosmological ideas and Allusive and Symbolic Images of the World.'

shape, placed lengthwise in the universe.[14] Similarly, the architectural design and proportions of King Solomon's Temple detailed in the Bible were founded on the same concept and related to the structural foundation of the universe.[15] It is significant that the dimensions of the Sistine Chapel (40.93m long x 13.41m wide) relate to those given by the Bible for Solomon's Temple, and its original ceiling decoration was the traditional one of the blue firmament covered with stars as the vault of heaven (fig. 4).[16]

In addition to the cosmological foundation of ecclesiastical architecture as evinced by the building of Solomon's Temple, the concept of God stretching out the Heavens as a canopy over the universe (emphasized in Isaiah 40:22, 42:5, 44:24 and 51:13) also became directly transferred to church architecture. This may be seen especially in the preference for domed architecture, which was prevalent in the early Eastern Christian church. The use of the dome is basically imitative of natural eye observation of the flat–earth covered by the 'Dome of Heaven' and it is thus evidently of distinct cosmological origin, as at the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, where it is also decorated with stars (fig. 5). Similarly, the use of barrel vaults over longitudinal churches, also related to perceptions of the structure of the universe, as will be seen, below.[17]

The concept of a relationship between the view of the universe and Church

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[14]Discussed by Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 92–93.

[15]See I Kings 6, where the precise dimensions of Solomon's temple are given.

[16]See A. Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo Rediscovered*, London: Muller, Blond and White, 1986, pp. 12, 40, and L. Heusinger and F. Mancinelli, *The Sistine Chapel*, London: Constable, 1973, p. 3. The currency of the concept of a parallel between the universe and the Temple in the Renaissance is demonstrated by O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*, pp. 132–133, and P. Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy, 1420–1540*, London: Batsford, 1972, pp. 156–157.

[17]See K. Lehmann, 'The Dome of Heaven' in W. E. Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 227–270. Lehmann discusses the concept of the ceiling or dome as sky, drawing a link with the architectural structure and various cosmic symbols. See also O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948, especially p. 14ff.; J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p. 28f, 'The church building as the cosmos,'; and L. Hautecoeur, *Mystique et Architecture. Symbolisme du Cercle et de la Coupole*, Paris: Picard, 1954. Also Koestler, *Sleepwalkers* p. 91f.

architecture was carried over into schemes of Christian Church decoration in which mosaics or frescoes were commonly arranged in layers or zones, relating both to the architectural structures and to the hierarchical schemes of the cosmos as outlined above.[18] Different areas of architectural surface were arranged and decorated with subject matter suitable to their positioning and in accordance with the evaluation of the hierarchies in the universe.[19] Byzantine and Medieval schemes of fresco and mosaic decoration were thus arranged as a symbolic reflection of the Divine order of the universe. The church itself was the 'microcosmos of the macrocosmos.'[20]

It is interesting to note that there was a revival of interest in these concepts, particularly related to domed architecture, during the Renaissance period. Evidence suggests that the cosmic significance of Church architecture was understood by architects like Brunelleschi (1377–1446), Alberti (1404–1472) and, later, Bramante (1444–1514) and Antonio Sangallo (1483–1546). The importance of the revival of the circular plan during the Renaissance has been examined by Wittkower, who comments extensively on its usage as having cosmic overtones as the image of God's universe.[21] Hautecoeur also discusses the revival of circular and domed architecture in Renaissance Italy. He draws attention, for example, to

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[18]See Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, pp. 15–29.

[19]For example, the Virgin was normally portrayed in the conch of the apse as the 'bridge' between the Heavenly and earthly zones. Important Byzantine schemes demonstrating these hierarchical systems are to be found at Hosios Loukas and Daphni, for which see D. Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, chapter 5.

[20]Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, p. 3. Similar principles applied in the West, in painted barrel vaults of which few survive, in the curved areas of Romanesque tympana, corresponding to the 'Dome of Heaven' seen in cross-section, and also in the vertical emphasis of Gothic structures, aspiring heavenwards. O. von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedrals: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956 discusses the Western type of cathedral as a model of the cosmos, as an imitation of God's created universe, p. 35f. The inclusion of the signs of the zodiac and the labours of the months in the programmes of the great cathedrals confirms the way in which Medieval decorative schemes incorporated the total world view.

[21]R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, London: Tiranti, 1967, especially pp. 27–33, 'The religious symbolism of centrally planned churches.' Burke, *Culture and Society*, p. 157, also comments on the significance of the circular plan in the Renaissance.

the Old Sacristy at the Medici Church of San Lorenzo where the dome is covered with significant astrological symbols, and cites designs for domed ecclesiastical architecture by Leonardo da Vinci, Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo himself – especially in relation to the designs for St Peter's.[22]

The relationship between the Christian image of the cosmos and Church architecture and decorative schemes was a principle which was also broadly applied to individual iconographical schemes – a tradition which will prove relevant in the consideration of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. A number of subjects in Christian iconography were commonly based on the underlying Christian hierarchical view of the universe. The idea of the flat–earth surmounted by Heaven above (with Hell beneath the earth's surface) is implicit in the standard iconography of scenes such as the *Resurrection*, *Ascension* and *Anastasis of Christ* (for example, fig. 6).[23] It is especially common in scenes of the *Annunciation* and *Baptism*, where the heavenly presence of God the Father is signified by a hand emerging from the clouds at the top of the format, and examples show that this tradition continued into the Quattrocento (see figs. 7, 8).[24]

The cosmological significance of Biblical events has also frequently been indicated in the depiction of God as creator (fig. 9) or ruler of the world (fig. 10);[25] likewise, the theophany, or depiction of God in majesty, frequently has zodiacal or astronomical overtones (fig. 11).[26] In a more incidental sense, the

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[22]Hautecoeur, *Mystique et Architecture*, especially pp. 274–280; see also 'Cosmology and Cartography,' in *Encyclopedia of World Art*, for comment on the re–emergence of the ancient cosmological symbolism of art and architecture during the Renaissance (especially pp. 841–844).

[23]This may readily be seen in numerous Byzantine, Medieval and Renaissance examples. See G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, (trans. J. Seligman), 2 vols. London: Lund Humphries, 1971.

[24]For examples of this practice in the early Renaissance, see the Master of the St Francis cycle at Assisi, *St Francis Renouncing his Earthly Possessions*, 1290's; Giotto, *Joachim's Sacrifice*, Arena Chapel, Padua, c. 1305.

[25]Important creation cycles occur at Monreale, Palermo, Florence Baptistery, and St. Mark's, Venice. Christ is shown seated on the sphere of the universe at St Vitale, Ravenna. For details of these and other examples see J. Zalten, *Creatio Mundi*, Stuttgart: Klett–Cotta, 1979.

[26]As for example in the synagogue at Beth Alpha, at Bawit and in the Dalmatic of Charlemagne, for which see, respectively, M. E. Stone, 'Judaism at the time of

inclusion of astronomical symbols, such as the sun and moon in the *Crucifixion*[27] or stars in the *Nativity*,[28] demonstrate the continuing interest and importance of this theme. Specific astronomical events, such as Joshua's commanding the sun to stand still, have also been depicted, as at Sta Maria Maggiore, Rome (fig. 12).[29] By far the most significant role played by cosmology, however, appears to be asserted in the various traditional scenes of the Last Judgment. Here, the subject appears to be particularly closely related to the Christian hierarchical view of the universe.

iii) Cosmology and the *Last Judgment*

The Last Judgment is especially suited to a cosmological interpretation since it is the major scene in Christian iconography where the parts of the universe, Heaven, Earth and Hell, would naturally be depicted together at the same time. The scene was also intended to reflect the actual relative physical positions of these three major zones in the real world. This realization might suggest a new direction to follow in the interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.

The theological concept of the Last Judgment is central to Christian doctrine and the Last Judgment scene itself, in Christian iconography, is a prime example of the depiction of very complex dogma in a single image. The fact that

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Christ,' *Scientific American*, 228 (1) Jan. 1973, pp. 80–87; A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origins*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, fig. 118; and De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, fig. 272. The concept of the integration of cosmic and Christian symbolism is also particularly discussed by L. Bréhier, *L'art Chrétien*, Paris: Renouard, 1928; Lehmann, 'Dome of Heaven,'; and E. Kitzinger, 'World Map and Fortune's Wheel. A Medieval Mosaic Floor in Turin,' in *idem*, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, pp. 327–356.

[27]For example, at Hosios Loukas. See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2., fig. 342f., for this and other examples.

[28]Giotto's *Nativity* in the Arena Chapel, Padua, c. 1305, is significant for its apparent inclusion of the star of Bethlehem in the guise of Halley's comet which appeared in 1301 (J. E. Bortle, 'A Halley Chronicle,' *Astronomy*, 13 (10) Oct. 1985, pp. 98–110, especially p. 103).

[29]See Joshua 10:12 (The example in Sta Maria Maggiore is discussed by Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, p. 49).

Christ was resurrected after death was regarded as proof of the Incarnation of the Godhead and also as proof that man too would be resurrected on the Last Day.[30] The question of man's Resurrection after his earthly death, at the time of the Second Coming of Christ, was a major theme addressed in the scene of the Last Judgment. The hypothesis that man was to be rewarded or punished according to his virtue or sin, led to a firm belief in the Last Judgment among the masses of the Christian peoples during the Early Christian, Byzantine and Medieval periods -- up to and including the Renaissance. Even during the sixteenth-century religious upheavals, the Reformation churches retained the concept as a central doctrine. They simply placed a new interpretation on the precise nature of the Last Judgment and reassessed the specific criteria by which souls might be judged (condemned or saved).[31] The idea of the Last Judgment in itself was scarcely called into doubt.

The significance and meaning of the Last Judgment scene in Christian iconography, its usual Biblical sources, its separate specific iconographical components and its use as disciplinary propaganda for the laity, have already been extensively dealt with in the literature.[32] Sources are in the main to be found directly in the Bible. They are common in the Old Testament, for example, Ezekiel 37:1–9, Daniel 7:13–24, Isaiah 13:6–9, Psalms 9:7 and Job 19:25. These consist mainly of eschatological visions of the fate of man at the end of the world and they are filled with the drama and horror of the penalties of the damned. Such scenes were vividly represented in Christian art.[33] Descriptions also occur in

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[30]This concept was emphasised by the Fathers of the Church, for example, St John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, (trans. F. H. Chase), Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1970, p. 401f., and St. Augustine, *City of God*, (trans. H. Bettenson) Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, p. 1027f.

[31]G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe*, London: Collins, 1971, p. 274f.; J. P. Martin, *The Last Judgment*, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963.

[32]See L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957, pp. 727–757; Mâle, *Gothic Image*, pp. 355–389; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, pp. 59–68.

[33]Numerous Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance examples remain. These will be fully examined in chapter 3, below, and summarised in Appendix I at the end.

the New Testament and often, here, refer more specifically to the role played by Christ as Judge. The writings of the Evangelists contain many references, for example, Matthew 24:30–36 and 25:31–46, describing the appearance of the Son of God in Heaven and the summoning of the elect and damned, separated on God's right and left hand, to be accorded everlasting punishment or life eternal, according to merit. Mark 12:25, Luke 14:14 and 17:22 appear mainly concerned with the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, while John 3:17–19 and 5:28–29 appear more optimistic with emphasis laid on Christ's role as Saviour (3:17) and the idea of Judgment in relation to merit (5:29). The Pauline writings such as I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4:16–17 are also important sources which again appear to lay more emphasis upon the saving of the just than the condemnation of the damned – the victory over death achieved through Jesus the saviour: 'O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy Victory.' (I Corinthians 15:55). A major New Testament source is, of course, the Book of Revelations itself (especially 1:7, 8:2–9 and 20:12), which marks a return to the more powerful type of eschatological vision. Other literary and theological sources have been argued as having been influential upon the interpretation and iconography of the depiction of the Last Judgment, including the writings of St Augustine, St Ephraim the Syrian, the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, the *Dies Irae* of Thomas a Celano and, in Renaissance Italy, the *Divina Commedia* (*Inferno*) of Dante Alighieri.[34]

The relative importance of the various sources for Last Judgment iconography may be assessed by an examination of different versions of the Last Judgment scene. A consideration of previous renderings of the Last Judgment scene is a necessary pre–requisite to a detailed assessment of the iconography of

[34]For general comment on these sources, see De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, pp. 63–67; Mâle, *Gothic Image*, pp. 365f. For the material proposed, see St Augustine, *City of God*, (trans. H. Bettenson), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, especially book 20, pp. 895– 963; Ephrem le Syrien, *Textes Arméniens relatifs à S Ephrem* (trans B. Outtier) Louvain: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum, 1985, vol. 16; Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, New York: Arno, 1969. For Thomas a Celano: De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 34, 109–111. The influence of Dante will be fully discussed below, chapter 6.

the version of the *Last Judgment* by Michelangelo himself. By analysis and comparison, it should be possible to discover whether a traditional formula was established by the sixteenth century and whether such a basic formula was related in its overall disposition to a view which reflected Biblical and/or contemporary cosmology. Leading on from this, the extent to which Michelangelo's version complied with or deviated from that norm may then be considered, with a view to examining the possible relationship between any change or variation in the scene's iconography and any change or variation in world-view and cosmology during the sixteenth century.

Chapter 3

Iconography of the Last Judgment

> And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
>
> Matthew 24:30.

i) Origins and early examples

The consideration of depictions of the Last Judgment[1] prior to the version by Michelangelo demonstrates a relationship between the iconographic scene, based on the notion of ascent to Heaven and descent to Hell, and the prevailing world view of the universe according to which Heaven was situated above and Hell beneath the earth's surface. A comparative study of over one hundred examples of the Last Judgment scene reveals several major themes which may be traced in these works (see Appendix I). Certain features are shared by Italian and non–Italian examples, which have both been included in this examination in order to establish the broad spectrum of the scene's iconography, its traditional format and component parts and, above all, its relationship with world view and astronomy and cosmology in general.

The majority of representations of the Last Judgment from the earliest surviving examples in the sixth century until the time of Michelangelo share certain common ideas and features which are derived from the scriptural sources. Apart from the question of the general overall disposition or arrangement of the scene, different specific themes seem to be common to all major examples. The iconography is complex since events taking place sequentially in verbal

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[1]Examples of all periods (Early Christian, Byzantine, Medieval and Renaissance) will be considered in order to establish the tradition of the scene's iconography. Special emphasis will be laid on the consideration of examples in Italy during the two centuries prior to Michelangelo, since these might be argued as having especial relevance as possibly known to the artist.

descriptions are shown as taking place at the same time and in the same place in visual depictions. For example, as outlined by Mâle [2] and Réau,[3] the scene is generally comprised of the following features: forewarning signs of the impending event, the appearance of the Judge (showing His wounds and the instruments of the Passion), angels with the symbols of the Passion, the Virgin and St John as intercessors, the Resurrection of the Dead (as skeletons, clothed or shrouded figures, or in some combination of these), the act of Judgment itself with Christ and the Apostles, and Archangels as assessors (as in the weighing of souls), the consequent separation of saved and damned and, finally, the bliss of the rewarded and the punishment and despair of the damned. This chronology of scenes is most often simultaneously depicted and, in the examples examined, many or all of these features are found to be included.

Very early examples of the Last Judgment scene are rare. In the seventh century, the Venerable Bede mentioned a *Last Judgment* of earlier date which had existed in the Basilica of St Peter's in Rome[4] but no visual record of this seems to have survived. Thus the earliest known surviving pictorial version of the subject is that of Cosmas Indicopleustes in his *Christian Topography.*[5] Cosmas Indicopleustes was an Alexandrian monk and traveller, active in the mid-sixth century. His *Christian Topography* is important for the way in which it summarizes Early Christian and Byzantine cosmology, based primarily on the Bible but also strongly influenced by the writings of the early Church Fathers.[6]

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[2]Mâle, *Gothic Image*, chapter 6.

[3]Réau, *Iconographie*, pp. 72?–757; see also K. Kunstle, *Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst*, Freiberg: Herder, 1928, pp. 521–557; Bréhier, *L'art Chrétien*, pp. 286–294, 391–397; and G. Schiller, *Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst*, vol. 3 (in German), Gutersloher: Mohn, 1966.

[4]Kunstle, *Ikonographie*, p. 525; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, n. 9 on p. 70.

[5]Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Χριστιανικη Τοπογραφια*, c. 535–547, (text and French trans. ed. W. Wolska-Conus), Paris: Du Cerf, 1968. See also D. V. Ainalov, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961 (1st ed. 1900–01), p. 33f, who cites N. P. Kondakov, *Histoire de l'Art Byzantin*, Paris, 1886, I, p. 150 (reprint, New York: Franklin, 1970).

[6]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 92–94.

Cosmas consolidated the cosmological theory of the earth that had already been started by men like Clement of Alexandria and Lactantius, basing his arguments on the Biblical foundations derived from the accounts of the creation in Genesis, Isaiah and the Psalms.[7] The universe, according to Cosmas, is the same shape as Moses' Tabernacle or the Temple of Solomon with flat base, perpendicular sides and a semi-cylindrical roof. The earth itself is a flat plane resting on the base. Cosmas' manuscript concerning Christian cosmology is especially significant art historically since, unlike the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, it is illustrated with diagrams as an integral part of the text. The diagram of the universe (fig. 13) is conceived as a finite figure with four vertical walls placed at right angles to each other and covered with a semi-circular barrel vault which represents the celestial zone or Heaven. This is a slight variation on the 'dome' principle but the underlying notion is the same. Cosmas' drawing of the walled-in universe relates extremely closely both to his own view of the universe and to the type of church architecture prevalent at the time of his writing in the sixth century, namely the early basilican church form.[8]

Thomas Kuhn points out that, although the cosmologies of men like Cosmas (and Lactantius) were never specifically adopted as official church doctrine, they were, nevertheless, typical and representative.[9] Summarizing an already established tradition, both Cosmas and Lactantius dismissed ancient pagan theories of the sphericity of the earth as ludicrous[10] and combined

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[7]For information on Clement of Alexandria (3rd century), Lactantius (4th century) and other early Medieval writers on cosmology of which these are typical, see Dreyer, *Thales to Kepler*, p. 208ff.; Draper, *Religion and Science*, pp. 63–67.

[8]Ainalov, *Hellenistic Origins*, p. 37f. See Cosmas, *Topographia*, book 2, section 35 for relationship between Moses' Tabernacle and the universe and book 3, section 80 for relationship between the universe and Christian dogma in general. The basilican form was, of course, popular in the West as well as in Cosmas' own area of Alexandria in Egypt (Huyghe, *Larousse*, p. 70).

[9]T. S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 108.

[10]Cosmas, *Topographia*, pp. 566–569; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, (trans. F. M. McDonald) Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964, book 3, chapter 24, 'On False Philosophy,' pp. 228–230. Compare St. Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 664–5.

geography, astronomy and theology to explain the very basic concept of the organization of the universe with an 'up for Heaven' and 'down for Hell' approach. What is especially significant here is that Cosmas' symbolism was also extended to individual iconographic subjects, as well as church design in general, and the scene of the Last Judgment is given particular emphasis. He depicts the diagram of the universe in elevation (fig. 14), with inscriptions indicating the different levels in the universe ('the waters above the firmament, the firmament called by God "Heavens," connected to the first heavens; the earth connected to the first heavens along its width'),[11] before going on to discuss the iconography of the Last Judgment, the scene in which Heaven, Earth and Hell would be depicted together. Cosmas' design for the *Last Judgment* (fig. 15) shows an immediate and obvious correspondence with his diagram of the universe (fig. 14). The scheme is compartmentalized, with no unifying background or landscape, and there seems little doubt that here a direct relationship was conceived between the celestial arrangement of the hierarchical scheme of superimposed layers, mounted by the vault of Heaven as if seen in cross–section, and the physical, topographical view of the universe. Cosmas' version of the Last Judgment scene is quite distinctly related to his own cross–sectional diagram of the universe, and corresponds exactly with his concept of the walled–in flat earth with Heaven above and Hell beneath the earth's surface. The different levels in Cosmas' *Last Judgment* are similarly labelled, 'the blessed,' 'the angels, – the first Heavens,' 'the saints – the empyrean' and 'the dead – those under the earth,' corresponding to the hierarchical pattern of the universe where each is disposed according to rank.[12]

Cosmas' *Last Judgment* is of prime importance in a discussion of the iconography of the subject, since it is on such an historical, composite approach to

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[11]Respectively, 'ΥΔΑΤΑ ΕΠΑΝΩ ΤΟΥ ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑΤΟΣ, ΚΑΙ ΕΚΑΛΕΣΕΝ Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΤΟ ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΝ, ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ ΣΥΝΔΕΔΕΜΕΝΟΝ ΤΩ ΠΡΩΤΩ ΟΥΡΑΝΩ, ΓΗ ΣΥΝΔΕΔΕΜΕΝΗ ΤΩ ΠΡΩΤΩ ΟΥΡΑΝΩ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟ ΠΛΑΤΟΣ.'

[12]See Ainalov, *Hellenistic Origins*, pp. 38–42; Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, pp. 182–185. The original inscriptions read: 'ΑΓΓΕΛΟΙ – ΕΠΟΥΡΑΝΙΟΙ; ΑΓΙΟΙ – ΕΠΙΓΙΟΙ; ΝΕΚΡΟΤΗΣ – ΚΑΤΑΧΘΟΝΙΟΙ.'

the subject that the traditional depiction of the scene was founded.[13] In its general features, this early depiction of the Last Judgment, dependent as it is upon the prevailing view of the universe, is typical of later Byzantine representations of the scene, as well as being basic to representations in the Medieval west. As far as Michelangelo's possible knowledge of the origins of such schemes is concerned, it is significant to point out that, of a total of three surviving manuscripts of Cosmas' *Christian Topography*, one is in the Laurentian Library in Florence and one in the Vatican Library at Rome, and they were already there by the time Michelangelo was working on the *Last Judgment* fresco.[14]

The cosmological basis of the *Last Judgment* as typified by Cosmas' manuscript was generally adhered to throughout later Byzantine versions as the tradition gradually extended westwards. In manuscripts, frescoes and mosaics, Christ is shown in majesty in the topmost zone, frequently enthroned or within an aureole or mandorla.[15] Saints, angels and the blessed are arranged in rows beneath Christ, according to a strict hierarchy and usually diminishing in size. Beneath this, those living and those being resurrected or judged stand within the zone representing earth. Below still, are the dead and damned, arising and looking hopefully upward or situated permanently in the underground abode of the dead.[16] This scheme thus possessed symbolic meaning and the figures are disposed according to a specific cosmological ordering which eliminates any possibility of a purely pictorial solution to the treatment of the composition as a whole.

The history of the representation of the Last Judgment reveals that this

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[14] See Cosmas, *Topographia*, pp. 45–50, for details of a total of 3 surviving manuscripts in Rome, Florence and Mount Sinai (in some cases later ninth–century copies of Cosmas' original sixth–century work). The copy (Pl.9.28) in the Laurentian Library in Florence (where Michelangelo was working 1524–26 and 1530–34) was recorded in the inventory of Medici books of 1495 (no. 744). That in the Vatican Library (Vat. Gr. 699) was included in an inventory of 1517 and again in 1533. [Information supplied through personal communications with respective libraries].

[15] For further comment on the use of the mandorla, see below chapter 4, section ii.

[16] Réau, *Iconographie*, p. 733, 740f. This is largely applicable to the examples up to the sixteenth century listed in Appendix I and to figs. 15–49 in the text.

system, with its zonal implications, was closely adhered to for many centuries. For example, in the ninth–century manuscript of the Sacra Parallela (fig. 16), where a miniature depicting the Last Judgment appears in the margin, Christ is depicted seated at the top in a semicircular structure which echoes the heavenly vault of Cosmas' diagram. Groups of angels, saved and damned souls are arranged in tiers below. Whilst not identical, this early version of the Last Judgment is disposed, overall, according to Cosmas' general scheme. Medieval manuscript versions show a similar hierarchical organisation (fig. 17)[17] and it was especially by means of such portable manuscript versions that the standard iconographical format was to spread widely in the west of Europe as well as in the east. The school of Reichenau in Germany, active in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and centred around the church of St George Oberzell, was a major centre for the production of manuscripts in the form of Psalters or Apocalypses, and from the Reichenau–Bamberg area many were dispersed throughout western Europe. Manuscript versions of the Last Judgment issuing from this major centre were largely based on the fresco of the subject in the church of St George Oberzell itself, which was arranged on separate levels with clear division into horizontal compartments (fig. 18). Other early western versions also tend to follow this similar, now standardized pattern. The fresco at St Angelo in Formis, 1072–1087 (fig. 19), which might perhaps have been known to Michelangelo,[18] follows the same arrangement, as do other eleventh century examples in northern Europe at St Jouin de Marne and St Michael Burgfelden, c. 1075–1100. These clearly adhere to the same arrangement as Cosmas' original manuscript tradition in the depiction of Christ in Judgment at the top and different, compartmentalized layers or zones, arranged in separate levels of descending tiers down to Hell–fire

[17]For details of this and other similar examples, see Appendix I, nos. 4, 5, 7, 8 and 33.

[18]Michelangelo is known to have travelled fairly widely in Italy (see chronology in E. Ramsden, (ed.) *The Letters of Michelangelo. Translated from the Original Tuscan*, 2 vols. London: Owen, 1963, vol. 1 lviii–lxv and vol. 2, lix–lxv) and art works in Italy which could have been viewed and considered by him (in Florence, Rome, Pisa, Orvieto, Bologna and Venice) will be given especial attention.

below. A single composition was divided horizontally into bands in superimposed sections to accomodate the different events of the Last Day simultaneously. In accordance with the idea of expressing a complex dogma in a single hieratic image, there was rarely any attempt to depict the sequence of events of judgment in a narrative or chronological fashion. The ordering of the complex scene was achieved by relating it to the ordering of God's universe.

Within the overall format of the scene, the most important themes which were included in representations of the Last Judgment were the Christ of the Second Coming in Judgment, positioned at the top, the separation of the righteous from the wicked, the resurrection of the dead below, and the punishment of the damned. Eastern Byzantine examples also continued along these lines but often included the *Hetoimasia* (Throne prepared for the Second Coming), the *Resurrection of Christ* or the *Anastasis* (or Christ's descent into limbo).[19] These additional scenes are also depicted in works by Byzantine artists on Italian soil, which, again, may have been known to Michelangelo. For example, in the *Last Judgment* on the interior of the west wall at Torcello near Venice, dating from the twelfth century (fig. 20), there are no less then five main horizontal bands which may be compared with a similar, but not identical, arrangement at St Angelo in Formis, mentioned above (fig. 19). The independent horizontal compartments are surmounted on the wall at Torcello by a large *Anastasis*, which is, properly speaking, related to rather than part of the *Last Judgment* scene. This section is probably of slightly different dating.[20] It is also interesting to note here that a left/right distinction in the arrangement of the lower levels of the blessed

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[19]Byzantine examples of the *Last Judgment*, which often include these subsidiary scenes, are too numerous too deal with here, especially since they would not have been accessible to Michelangelo. However, it is also important to demonstrate the standardization of the subject's iconography, so a number of examples have been included in Appendix I (see nos. 6, 29, 57, 86 and 87). The Byzantine examples are significant because their established iconography underlies the basis of the Italo–Byzantine examples in Italy proper.

[20]For details of the Torcello mosaic, see R. Polacco, *La Cattedrale di Torcello. Il Giudizio Universale*, Canova: L'altra Riva, 1984. The enormous Christ of the *Anastasis* at the top compensates for the relatively small Christ of the *Last Judgment*.

and the damned with respect to Christ is also becoming increasingly emphasised, as also indicated at St Angelo. This is evidently based on the Biblical text of Matthew 25:33–34: 'And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left,' and refers in turn to the common concept of the right hand as a privileged position, as Christ was generally placed on God's right hand (as in the Nicene Creed). The ascending and descending notion, related to cosmological precepts, is combined with the scripturally based left/right divisions.

Other examples of the Last Judgment scene in Italy in the region influenced by Byzantine style and iconography include the Palatine Chapel at Palermo, 1129–43, and Monreale, 1174–82. These latter works, whilst probably not familiar to Michelangelo, any more than examples in the Byzantine east, do serve to demonstrate the prevalence of the standard type of the Last Judgment scene, based on hierarchical banding, which is found in many such examples,[21] and which also extends to later works like the Benedictine altarpiece, now in the Vatican Gallery, usually dated to the twelfth century (fig. 21). The format here is circular, suggestive of the sphere of the universe, but the division of the scene into ascending levels with Christ at the top is quite clear.[22]

ii) Northern Medieval examples

In Medieval Europe, depictions of the Last Judgment were especially popular in the sculptural programs of the great French cathedrals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although Michelangelo did not travel outside Italy, a brief consideration of this group is important for the confirmation it gives to the very widespread nature of the cosmological basis for Last Judgment iconography.

In French portal sculpture, the Last Judgment scene was usually placed in the tympanum of the west portal and, as Mâle points out,[23] was featured on

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[21]See Appendix I, nos. 17 and 26.

[22]See P. de Vecchi, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*' in Chastel et al, *Sistine Chapel*, p. 180.

[23]Mâle, *Gothic Image*, p. 365.

almost all major French cathedrals of the thirteenth century, although this sculptural type was rare in Italy. This important positioning of the subject over the main portal signifies its doctrinal importance, for in such a prominent position the impression on the laity would be very great. It evidently served as a strong reminder that Judgment was an imminent occurence for which preparation should be made. There are also cosmological or astronomical associations since the west portal was positioned to face and be lit by the setting sun at the end of the day. When painted or frescoed in the interior of a church, the scene also generally had a western emphasis (by being placed normally on the interior of the west wall), thus being viewed by the congregation as a reminder on exit and again associated with the end of the day or the setting of the sun. This association assumes significance where Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is concerned and the fresco's problematic positioning on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, which has an unusual western orientation, will be discussed in a subsequent section.[24]

In versions of the Last Judgment in French cathedral sculpture, the shape of the tympanum itself, where the scene was usually depicted, relates directly to the contemporary world view in terms of the 'dome of Heaven' since it seems to correspond to a cross-section of this.[25] In the early twelfth century at Autun (fig. 22), the large-scale figure of Christ traverses and dominates the scene and figures are adapted and distorted in order to fit into the appropriate place in the format. Being semi-circular, the tympanum does not lend itself to a vertical emphasis and the left/right distinction is emphasised at the same time as the top to bottom layering. At Autun, Hell is actually in the lower right of the tympanum proper. The development of the scene in French portal sculpture may be traced through other such early examples as Ste Foy de Conques, 1115-25 (fig. 23), Beaulieu, 1135, and Carennac, c. 1130-50. While the separated saved and damned are sometimes depicted at either end of the lowest level in these examples (unlike the earlier arrangement of Hell alone as the bottom layer) Christ is still clearly in the

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[24]See chapter 7, section v.

[25]See Lehmann, *Dome of Heaven*, p. 227f., for discussion of the dome concept.

most prominent position at the top. At St Denis, 1135–44 (restored by Viollet le Duc in the nineteenth century), the huge Christ dominates in a cruciform position (fig. 24), while at St Trôphime at Arles, 1150, the composition is carefully ordered in separate hierarchical layers. In comparison, at Laon, 1160–1225, the scene of the resurrecting dead on the lowest level seems somewhat cramped and overcrowded.[26] Slight variations lead, as Mâle points out, to the 'final formulation' in Notre Dame at Paris, 1163–1250 (fig. 25).[27] This established formula is largely pursued in the great thirteenth century developments, where even more tiers are shown, as at Chartres, 1200–1260, Bourges, 1210–1275, Rheims, 1211–90, and Amiens, 1220–88 (as exemplified by fig. 26).[28] The different components are carefully disposed in the curve of the tympana according to the traditional formula, related, as has been shown, to the standardized view of the layered, hierarchical cosmos. In the Gothic examples, with Christ again on a more human scale and significantly naked to the waist to reveal His wounds, the figure is set again right at the top, rather than spanning several levels as in the Romanesque. The Last Judgment scene thus fitted into the curved space of the tympanum in the same way as in the curved top of Cosmas' cross-sectional diagram of the cosmos. The basic format with Christ situated at the top, above hierarchical compartmentalized tiers of saints, angels, saved and damned is followed. This is evidently related to the prevailing world view of Christ situated in the Dome of Heaven with an orderly design of descending layers beneath.

While many earlier Romanesque depictions of the Last Judgment are arranged, as in Cosmas' original design, in compartmentalized tiers descending towards the lowest level of the resurrecting dead or the level of Hell itself, several examples within the Gothic period (such as Paris, Notre Dame and Rheims) tend to lay an even greater emphasis on the scriptural separation between the saved

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[26]See Appendix I for details of these (nos. 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23) and for sources of those portals not illustrated in the text.

[27]Mâle, *Gothic Image*, p. 366 and Appendix I, no. 25.

[28]See Appendix I, nos. 35, 36, 37 and 38.

and damned to the right and left of Christ, as discussed above. This means that the figures of the saved and damned increasingly appear on the same horizontal level (fig. 25), demonstrating a variation from the very earliest traditional cosmological basis of the scene. A contrast is formed with earlier examples where the resurrecting dead are usually portrayed right across the lowest level (fig. 22). The souls have not yet been judged and their open graves therefore suggest that the realm beneath the earth's surface extends below the pictorial space of the tympanum. Where the vertical (left/right) contrast receives as much emphasis as the horizontal distinctions, these examples appear to be less reliant on the strict cosmological formula. At Amiens the 'mouth of hell' is actually situated on a higher level than the resurrecting dead and lies opposite the blessed on the same horizontal register. This reflects the developing importance of the left–right distinction in the scene and a diminished reliance on the cosmological formula based on a flat–earth perception of the universe, which, as we shall see, becomes even less strictly adhered to during the Renaissance period.

In keeping with the general trend of Gothic as opposed to early Medieval or Romanesque art, some humanizing tendencies become evident in the later French versions. Christ's attitude and the gestures He makes are particularly significant in determining the overall approach to the subject. Where Christ is depicted semi–naked and showing His wounds, this emphasizes both the idea of redemption and His suffering for Mankind, as well as His role as Judge. Facial expression and hand gestures often suggest condemnation or redemption or both, and raised arms at the same time as displaying the stigmata, convey the idea of the *orans* position as a Redemptive Saviour, rather than a severe Judge, as at Paris (Notre Dame) and Bourges.[29] The gesture and position of Christ is highly significant in determining the overall approach to the subject and is an important aspect of the scene's iconography.

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[29]Christ's wounds are alternatively read as a sign of His suffering or as vengeful pointing out of His betrayal by mankind. A. S. Barb, 'The Wound in Christ's side,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34, 1971, p. 320f.

Similar principles to those relevant to French portal sculpture also apply to other examples of the *Last Judgment* from more northerly areas of Europe, namely Germany and the Low Countries. Although similarly not likely to have produced any direct influence on the master, versions from Northern Europe do again serve to demonstrate the wide influence of the very traditional basis of the depiction of the Last Judgment in Christian iconography.

Northern examples of the Last Judgment of the late Medieval period or early Renaissance, dating from the fifteenth century, include those by Van Eyck, Stephan Lochner, Rogier van der Weyden, Petrus Christus, Dieric Bouts, Hans Memlinc and Martin Schongauer.[30] A later group, perhaps also still 'Gothic' rather than Renaissance in tone, include works by Dürer, Cranach, Bosch, Jean Provost and Lucas van Leyden which all date from the early sixteenth century.[31] These examples are mainly in the form of panel paintings or portable altarpieces on the Last Judgment theme and those by Van Eyck, c. 1424, and Rogier van der Weyden, after 1450, appear to be typical (figs. 27 and 28). The basic traditional format of Christ situated above with descending levels of saints and angels, saved and damned, is applied. In these altarpieces, however, the levels are not strictly separated by bands but integrated into a unified composition to a larger extent. This is more similar, as shall be seen, to Italian Renaissance examples. Layered arrangements are sometimes combined with additional scenes in the side panels of northern altarpieces. This emphasizes the right–left distinction as the saved and condemned are additionally placed on Christ's right hand and his left or sinister, but the different zones or levels and the up/down contrasts are still easily distinguishable (fig. 27). It is interesting to note that in these northern examples

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[30]See Appendix I, nos. 71, 72, 79, 81, 83, 85 and 88 respectively.

[31]See Appendix I, nos. 93, 94, 95, 96 and 97. See C. Harbison, *The Last Judgment in Sixteenth Century Northern Europe*, New York: Garland, 1976, for further details of northern *Last Judgments* of which 260 examples are listed, pp. 267–302, including four by Dürer and followers. Harbison shows how the Protestants and Catholics directed the theme against one another, and also how the *Last Judgment* was used in civic buildings and courthouses as an image for the representation of law and justice – an idea also emphasized by S. Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 22–29.

Christ is invariably seated on an arc–en–ciel (celestial arch),[32] a cosmological motif which conveys to a rectangular altarpiece the same concept as the semi–circular tympanum or 'dome of Heaven'.

The work of Albrecht Dürer is especially important amongst Northern artists as far as an influence in Italy might be claimed. Owing to his travels, and the circulation of his engravings and woodcuts, his Apocalyptic visions did become known in Italy and Condivi mentions Michelangelo's acquaintance with his work.[33] Versions of the Last Judgment by Dürer were, however, less well known than his series like the *Apocalypse* (1498) and the various *Passion* series (1498–1510, 1509–11 and 1507–12) or individual engravings like the *Melencolia* (1514). Powerful cosmological, astronomical and even astrological concepts were expressed in works like *Nemesis* (1502) and scenes from the *Apocalypse* series. Classical aspects of his work which are of particular relevance include the concept of the amalgamation of Apollo and Christ as *Sol Iustitiae* which will be further discussed in chapter 5.[34]

iii) Italian Renaissance examples

Examples of the *Last Judgment* in Renaissance Italy which predate Michelangelo's version in the Sistine Chapel, are based on similar underlying precepts as Medieval and Byzantine examples, which have clearly been shown to be strongly influenced by scriptural cosmology for their basic composition. The structured, layered format corresponds to the basic cosmological formula of the 'Up' for Heaven, 'Down' for Hell approach. Many of the Italian versions would have been accessible to Michelangelo in central Italy; it would have been quite

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[32]For example, Appendix I, nos. 72, 79, 81, 83, 85, 93, 94, 95, 96 and 97.

[33]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 99.

[34]E. Panofsky, *Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, for example, *Vision of the Seven Candlesticks*, 1498 (fig. 76), *St John before God*, 1496 (fig. 77), and *The Seven Trumpets from the Apocalypse*, 1496 (fig. 80), all relate to the book of Revelations.

possible for him to have seen and considered versions of the Last Judgment in, for example, Pisa, Rome, Florence and Padua.[35] Major examples in Florence include the mosaics of the Baptistery, which would no doubt have been familiar, Nardo di Cione's version in Sta Maria Novella (Strozzi chapel), Orcagna's frescoes in Sta Croce and Fra Bartolommeo's fresco in Sta Maria Nuovo. In Pisa, the cycle in the Camposanto would almost certainly have been known to Michelangelo on his travels as well as, probably, Giotto's version in Padua. In Rome itself, major examples include the fresco at SS Quattro Coronati and Cavallini's fresco in Sta Cecilia, as well as manuscript versions and an important Benedictine altarpiece in the Vatican collections, already mentioned above. Signorelli's series of frescoes at nearby Orvieto has also been suggested as a source for Michelangelo's version.[36] The later, Renaissance versions do vary more in emphasis and detailing and are more loosely organized than the strict, Medieval or Byzantine compartmentalized format. The overall hierarchical scheme is the same, but, as will be seen, certain adjustments to the Medieval iconographical formula have taken place. Later Italian examples of the Last Judgment from the trecento, quattrocento and cinquecento are of particular relevance and significance since, in many cases, a direct influence on Michelangelo could be argued.

The earliest of the 'proto-Renaissance' versions of the Last Judgment are the sculpted pulpits by the Pisani in Pisa, Pistoia and Siena.[37] These involve designs with intertwined figures emphasizing the drama and action of the scene with a rather more unified approach to the general theme. Different areas are separated out in adjacent panels with the Christ Judge receiving a central emphasis, as at Pistoia (fig. 29). There is some relation to the French Gothic type of sculptural scene since figures are broadly arranged according to ascending and

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[35]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 99.

[36]See Appendix I, nos. 60, 62, 90, 66, 51, 40, 46, 24 and 92 respectively. Detailed individual discussion follows below.

[37]Appendix I, nos. 42, 43, 45 and 54. Other sculpted versions in Italy include the tympanum of Parma Cathedral by Antelami (no. 34) and Maitani's marble panel at Orvieto (no. 44).

descending levels with the damned nearest to the lowest edge, on Christ's left. Similarly, the composition of other Italian examples from the thirteenth century was often based on ordered and hierarchical levels but with a somewhat more unified approach to the design as a whole. The lack of emphasis on actual separating bands in these examples contrasts with the earlier French examples and also with the Italo–Byzantine type of clearly defined and separate areas, like Torcello (fig. 20). The same basic underlying zonal structure is still present, in accordance with the celestial and cosmological hierarchies, but there is less rigid adherence to the strict, compartmentalized zonal structure. At the same time, the left/right arrangement appears to receive more emphasis and other variations include the addition of extra scenes. A certain relaxation of the Medieval iconographical formula thus begins to take place in Renaissance Italy.

The mid–thirteenth–century fresco in Rome at SS. Quattro Coronati (fig. 30) is an example of this increasing variation. Christ is the dominating figure at the top, set higher than the ranks of the Apostles in the traditional manner, but, in comparison with earlier versions, especially at Torcello and St Angelo in Formis, adaptation of the format has taken place. The scene has still been defined as a *Last Judgment* and includes standard characteristics like the outsize enthroned Christ in Majesty, and the angels trumpeting and rolling back the starred scroll of Heaven – but it has been unusually combined with scenes from the life of St Sylvester (patron saint of the Chapel) and Christ is partially nude, to emphasize His wounds, rather than depicted in majesty.

Lorenzo Maitani's marble panel at Orvieto of 1270–1330 (fig. 31) does adhere more closely to the basic layered format but with no decorative separating bands. Instead, the branches of the Tree of Life serve to separate out the various levels. An astronomical Sun–symbol is included at top right. Dating from about the same time, and showing classical influence in the toga–robed figures, is Cavallini's fresco in Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome, c. 1293. Now badly damaged, the original scheme may be seen from a reconstruction (fig. 32) and the composition is ordered and hierarchical in emphasis. The use of decorative bands

to split up the different areas of the fresco is, however, minimal.[38]

In Florence itself, and surely known to Michelangelo, a late thirteenth–century mosaic of the *Last Judgment* is situated in the central dome of the Florence Baptistery (figs. 33 and 34). Attributed to Coppo di Marcovaldo, it appears more directly influenced by Italo–Byzantine schemes in the way in which the format is rigidly divided up into horizontal registers, running around the dome. Cosmological allusions are evident in the depiction of the enormous Christ seated on the rainbow–like arcs of Heaven specifically in accordance with the Biblical reference; a space is left at the very top of the dome to admit the light of the sun.[39] Christ's gesture here also appears significant, a combination of blessing and damnation as one hand gestures upwards, the other with thumb downwards. The gesture of Christ is an important theme in versions of the Last Judgment and, here, a significant part of the evolution of the gesture which culminates in Michelangelo's Sistine version appears to be indicated.

Turning to the seminal series of frescoes worked at Assisi in the late Duecento (fig. 35),[40] the version attributed to Cimabue in the upper church demonstrates what appears to be developing as the standard approach to the subject in early Renaissance Italy. This is dependent on the arrangement of the *Last Judgment* in hierarchical levels, but with less formality in the iconography and composition in comparison with the Early Christian or Byzantine type. This increased adaptation of the traditional pattern is characterized by the absence of the strict separation of registers by decorative banding.

The most significant variation on the standard pattern or formula was undertaken at this time by Giotto in the Arena Chapel, Padua, c. 1305 (fig. 36).

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[38]See Appendix I, nos. 44 and 46. For further discussion see, for example, F. Hartt, *A History of Italian Renaissance Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, new revised ed. 1987, pp. 119–121 and 50–51.

[39]Ezekiel 1:28, Revelations 4:3. See Appendix no. 47 and Hartt, *Italian Renaissance*, p. 44. On the admission of the light of the sun, see E. Borsook, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany*, London: Phaidon, 1967, p. xxif.

[40]See Appendix I, no. 50 and E. Battisti, *Cimabue*, Pennsylvania University Press, 1967; A. Smart, *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto*, Oxford Clarendon, 1971; Borsook, *Mural Painters*, pp. 3–7.

Giotto retains the symmetrical disposition in horizontal zones and, thereby, the hierarchical structure, but the levels are once more not separated by bands. The emphasis on the river of flame finds a distinct parallel in early manuscript examples (compare no. 8); it flows down and away from Christ to the bottom right hand corner, maintaining the earlier left/right distinction. In the compositional feature of the 'rainbow round about the throne' and the 'scroll of Heaven,' the fresco also relates to tradition and indeed directly to the Biblical description of the Last Day.[41] Although the major iconographic features are present, however, Giotto's *Last Judgment*, more than any earlier example, deviates from the tradition of independent horizontal compartments. Compared with earlier examples such as St Angelo in Formis (fig. 19), Torcello (fig. 20), or the Baptistery in Florence (figs. 33, 34), Giotto has taken measures to unite the composition by placing less emphasis on the usual subdivisions. Giotto's interest in the depiction of a more naturalistic space could also be argued as having influenced this arrangement.[42] Although the figures are grouped in a single pictorial space, the iconographic tradition still underpins the fresco and has exerted considerable influence upon the differentiation of the various groups. The figure of Christ, while following the tradition of dominating in scale, is unusually placed and again demonstrates a less strict adherence to the established iconographical format. His more central position may be accounted for by the problem of the large window set in the wall. Because of this intrusion, it appears, Giotto took the step of placing Christ relatively much lower down on the picture surface, but He is still placed above all other figures except the celestial hierarchies of angels and He remains significantly much larger in size.[43] Thus, despite certain innovative elements it seems that the use of a layered, hierarchical format for the

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[41]Revelations 4:3; 6:14 and 20:9f.

[42]J. Stubblebine, *The Arena Chapel Frescoes*, New York: Norton, 1969, pp. 89–90.

[43]Unlike Giotto, Michelangelo did not permit existing architectural features of the wall to intrude or affect the positioning of his figures. He had the existing windows (see fig. 4) in the Sistine Chapel filled in.

representation of the Last Judgment had become a convention for representing the subject and making it easily recognizable.

In Giotto's fresco at Padua, cosmological allusions, based once more on specific Biblical references, are to be found in the upper area where angels roll back the Heavens, with the sun and moon, revealing the Heavenly Jerusalem. A rather more humane approach to the theme of the Last Judgment has been detected in Giotto's version which perhaps parallels Gothic humanizing tendencies. Christ is turned towards the blessed on His right rather than the damned (sinister), and the intercessory role of the Virgin is stressed. The prominent cross, referring to Christ's sacrifice for man's salvation also presents a less severe theme. Mercy and salvation rather than hopelessness and despair has been viewed as the major theme expressed, even though Hell is still vividly depicted on the lowest right–hand register.[44]

The trait of humaneness or optimism in examples of the *Last Judgment* such as Giotto's in the early Trecento has been contrasted by Meiss with later Trecento versions, made after the Black Death in the mid–fourteenth century.[45] From this time, Meiss argues,[46] there is an increasing note of pessimism in ecclesiastical art, as the result of the impact of the Black Death which devastated Europe. Examples of the *Last Judgment* dating from the middle decades of the fourteenth century by Nardo di Cione in the Strozzi chapel at Sta Maria Novella (figs. 37, 38), by Orcagna in Sta Croce (fig. 39), and in the frescoes of the Camposanto at Pisa, variously attributed to Traini, Orcagna or Buffalmacco (fig. 40), all appear to give more emphasis to the pessimistic view.[47] At Pisa, the stress is laid on the suffering and punishments of the damned rather than the bliss of the saved, and a more spiritual, abstract approach to God as a remote, awesome

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[44]Stubblebine, *Arena Chapel*, p. 90; also D. C. Shorr, 'The Role of the Virgin in Giotto's *Last Judgment*,' in Stubblebine, *Arena Chapel*, pp. 169–182.

[45]M. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

[46]*Ibid*, especially chapter 3, pp. 74–93.

[47]*Ibid*, p. 76f. See Appendix I, nos. 60, 62 and 66.

figure in an almost Byzantine manner becomes apparent. This phenomenon Meiss attributes to the horrors of the plague era when terror (or gratitude for escape) on the part of survivors might also have stimulated patronage. The frescoes at Pisa, he argues, show a horror such as might have been inspired by the 'Hell on earth' of the Black Death, and, unlike the tortures depicted by Giotto, are not tempered by more humane aspects. The enormous Hell at Pisa is emphasized in what could be viewed as a separate section, again on Christ's sinister. The idea of the plague as punishment for sin contributed to a fervent religious revival in the hope that piety would avert further evil, but, at the same time, a consciousness of the brevity of life and the ever–presence of death also produced a materialistic attitude, reflected in the maxim, 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.'

As far as the cosmological basis of the scene is concerned, these later fourteenth–century examples still reflect the trend begun in the late Medieval period of a slightly freer interpretation of the subject and a movement away from the strict separation of registers by bands. The overall format remains, however, as before, quite clearly related to the cosmological concept of Christ situated in a 'mandorla' above in the Heavens with Hell, strongly emphasised at this time, at the lowest level beneath, as in altarpieces of the time (figs. 41, 42). Nardo di Cione's frescoes in the Strozzi chapel of Sta Maria Novella, Florence (figs. 37, 38) demonstrate a fluidity in the depiction of the Last Judgment format since more than one wall is used. His depiction of Hell (fig. 38) separately on a side wall is intensely hierarchical in the way in which it is specifically arranged in accordance with Dante's system of the universe and his vision of the realms of *Inferno*, and it is clearly labelled by inscription as such.[48] In Nardo's Paradise, the depiction of Mary on a twin throne at the same level as Christ is evidence of Mariolatry in this period, as are Traini's twin figures of Christ and Mary at the Camposanto in Pisa (fig. 40).[49] The elevation here of Mary as intercessor seems to be the one

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[48]Hartt, *Italian Renaissance*, pp. 124–5.

[49]Appendix I, nos. 60 and 66. For 'Mariolatry' (the raising of Mary's status, being revered almost on a par with Christ) at this time, see Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena*, pp. 41–44.

counterbalance to the pessimism stressed by Meiss in these examples.

Traini's fresco may be argued as a possible direct influence on Michelangelo, owing to the latter's visits to Pisa.[50] The gesture of rejection of Traini's Christ towards the damned, shown by Meiss to fit in with the late fourteenth–century pessimistic readings of the theme, appears to stress the effect of judgment and the resulting damnation of sinners is thus emphasized and as such has been argued as a source for the gesture of Michelangelo's Christ.[51] The huge figure of Satan in an additional scene to the right of the main fresco at the Camposanto is also evidence of the late fourteenth–century emphasis on the pessimism of the theme. The basic dispositon of the fresco, however, is still related to the traditional cosmology–based format. Although the zones and different hierarchical levels in which the figures are arranged are not separated by bands, they are clearly evident and the overall composition according to hierarchical levels remained little altered during the following century in Italy.

In the late fourteenth century, the two major divisions of Heaven and Hell are emphasized in the fresco of the Last Judgment in the Bargello (fig. 43). Although the fresco is now badly damaged, Hell is clearly positioned in the centre of the lower edge. In the fifteenth century, at least three versions by Fra Angelico (exemplified by fig. 44), the altarpiece now often considered to be by his follower, Zanobi Strozzi (fig. 45), and works by Bertoldo di Giovanni, Giovanni di Paolo and Vecchietta also show a similar overall arrangement.[52] Here, again, the basic underlying structures remain cosmological and traditional even though a more unified effect is achieved than in earlier more rigid examples. Although the damned frequently appear on Christ's sinister, the lower regions of the Dead are often more implied (below the picture frame) than literally represented, as is also the case with Fra Bartolommeo's fresco made at the end of the century for Sta

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[50]Ramsden, *Letters of Michelangelo*, vol. 1, no. 112; Michelangelo visited the nearby marble quarries of Carrara on several occasions.

[51]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 113. Further discussion on the meaning of the gesture of Michelangelo's Christ will follow in chapter 4.

[52]For details and illustrations of these, see Appendix I, nos. 63, 73–78.

Maria Nuovo and now in the museum of San Marco (fig. 46).[53]

In keeping, perhaps, with a general trend in fifteenth-century Italy of an increased number of altarpieces and panel paintings in addition to schemes of fresco or mosaic church decoration, a large number of these works are in the form of altarpieces. Of this group, Fra Angelico's work may be regarded as typical of the period. In general mood and approach to the subject, his works demonstrate a return to a less overtly dramatic interpretation of the theme, as is characteristic of his work in general. In spite of the emphatic gesture of Christ which is frequently used (fig. 44 and also 46) and reminiscent of Traini's Christ in the Camposanto (fig. 40), a gentler, more decorative approach to the subject becomes evident and floral depictions of the garden of Paradise become the norm (fig. 45). In this well known altarpiece now in the Museum of San Marco, the way in which the figures, with Christ at the top, fit into the suggested dome shape of the format of the altarpiece itself appears to relate, once again, to the cosmological concepts alluded to above.[54] The participants in the scene are arranged in corresponding levels which are clearly defined without being separated by actual banding. With the emphasis placed optimistically on Paradise, the dramatic possibilities of Hell receive less emphasis. It is placed more to one side, Christ's sinister, while the area of the dead, below ground level, is suggested by the open tombs at the lower edge of the painting as extending beneath the space of the altarpiece itself.[55]

In the latter part of the fifteenth century and in the early part of the sixteenth century, versions of the *Last Judgment* became rarer, although some did circulate in printed form, like the one associated with Savonarola's *Triumphis Crucis*, clearly more pessimistic, with Hell dominating right across the lower section (fig. 47). Apart from the fresco by Fra Bartolommeo, Signorelli's series of

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[53]See Appendix I, no. 90.

[54]J. Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico*, London: Phaidon, 1952. According to Pope-Hennessy, fig. 44 is the only certain attribution to Fra Angelico (*ibid.*, p. 191).

[55]See next section for further discussion and possible explanation of this problem.

frescoes in the San Brizio Chapel in Orvieto cathedral is a major example, which has also often been claimed as influential on Michelangelo (figs. 48, 49). These works date from the turn of the century, about 1499/1500.[56] Fra Bartolommeo's fresco is in poor condition but the hierarchical structuring and the separate layering of the scene are still clearly visible. Here, encircled by winged cherub heads, Christ again takes the prime position at the very top of the picture space. Saints are arranged below in a semi-circle extending back into space and the resurrected are indicated beneath. The gesture of Christ appears to be significant as a possible influence on Michelangelo's Christ.[57] The dramatic quality of the nude figures of Signorelli's fresco has also been singled out as a possible influence on Michelangelo's Sistine version.[58] In Signorelli's *Last Judgment* (figs 48, 49), the various scenes are separated out onto different parts of the walls and vaults (like the earlier Strozzi *Last Judgment*), and include other scenes related to the Antichrist, which seems to deny the possibility of a hierarchical arrangement. Perhaps this was also a response to the architectural features, or the commission from the patron, but, from this point of view, the scheme is not strictly speaking a *Last Judgment* in the same way as the examples by artists like Giotto, Fra Bartolommeo and Michelangelo where the iconography is expressed in a single image on one area of wall surface. The overall arrangement does still suggest the cosmic theme, however, since the programme is enhanced by the starry background (fig. 48). It is significant that Signorelli's version of the *Last Judgment*, which splits up the chronological events of the process of Judgment into separately treated areas, shows how, by the sixteenth century, not only a

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[56]Réau *Iconographie Chrétien*, p. 756. For Orvieto see A. Chastel, 'L'Apocalypse en 1500; La Fresque de l'antichrist à la Chapelle de San Brice d'Orvieto,' *Humanisme et Renaissance*, 14, 1952, pp. 129–140 and E. Carli, *Il Duomo di Orvieto*, Rome: Stato, 1965.

[57]Although Traini's fresco in the Camposanto at Pisa has been argued as the source for the gesture of Michelangelo's Christ, there appear to be several other alternatives which should be considered. It is also important to consider the ways in which gestures may vary in meaning according to time and place, for which see D. Morris et al., *Gestures. Their Origins and Distribution*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1979.

[58]For example, Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, p. 155.

general 'loosening up' of the iconography but major divergence was becoming more and more possible, setting a precedent for Michelangelo's variations on the traditional cosmological arrangement. By the sixteenth century a break had clearly been made with the traditional format or pattern of the scene which had been followed virtually unquestioned for nearly a millenium since the *Last Judgment* in the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes.

iv) Influence of changes in cosmology

The Renaissance versions of the *Last Judgment*, in the two centuries preceding Michelangelo, thus do exhibit more variation in emphasis and detailing and are more loosely organised than the strict Byzantine or Medieval compartmentalized format. The overall hierarchical scheme, derived from the Biblical concepts of ascent to Heaven and descent to Hell remains the same, but certain adjustment to the traditional iconographical formula has taken place. This may be attributed to a number of possible factors.

Firstly, the flat–earth view of the universe which was based on scripture and underlay the iconography of Byzantine and Medieval depictions of the Last Judgment scene had started, gradually, to give way to the view of a spherical earth. This view had come under discussion in the early Middle Ages,[59] but it received increasing attention throughout the Medieval period. By the time of the early Renaissance, the flat–earth view was rapidly becoming obsolete and the concept of the spherical earth was becoming acceptable and this was reflected in

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[59]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 94ff; Dreyer, *Thales to Kepler*, p. 226. The astronomer–Pope Sylvester II (999–1004) contributed to the recognition of the earth as a sphere and had constructed terrestrial globes, but the flat–earth concept obviously continued alongside as a popular concept in the mind of the masses well into the Medieval period (Koestler, p. 102f, 'The Age of Double–Think'). The sphericity of the earth was finally confirmed by such phenomena as the shadow cast by the earth on the moon during an eclipse, the effect of ships disappearing from view before their masts at the horizon and the voyages of discovery and circumnavigation. It is important to remember that explorers like Columbus set out *because* they were already convinced of the earth's sphericity (F. Arnesto, *Columbus and the Conquest of the Impossible*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974).

contemporary art.[60] In literature too, Dante's writings, for example, quite clearly relate to a spherical earth in a spherical universe. But this system remained problematic since, when it was combined with the Biblical concepts of ascent to Heaven and descent to Hell beneath the earth's surface, the resultant spherical universe would necessarily be 'haidocentric' – with Hell at the centre of the concentric spheres.[61]

The growing realisation of the scientific inadequacies of the flat–earth theory and its questioning in Renaissance Italy could well have encouraged the relaxation of the strict cosmological structure of the depiction of the Last Judgment and the shift away from the traditional format. Giotto's version (fig. 36) is a case in point, and his contacts with Dante and interest in astronomy are well known.[62] Examples have also been cited above where the scene is spread across more than one area and hence not to be regarded as *Last Judgment* proper with a vertical hierarchy (figs. 37, 38; 47, 48), although the traditional iconography continued to exert a potent influence in unified scenes of the Last Judgment.[63]

A second probable cause for changes in Last Judgment iconography in Renaissance Italy was the alteration in the positioning of the scene of the Last Judgment itself. In some Byzantine examples and also in French portal sculpture, the tendency had been for the Last Judgment to be depicted on the west wall of a church, related to the setting of the sun. With the advent of portable altarpieces,

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[60]The landscape backgrounds of Piero della Francesca's *Triumphs of Federigo da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza* (c. 1470) and Antonio del Pollaiuolo's *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* (1475) may be cited as examples (and also fig. 47).

[61]See especially Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, 3 vols., (text and translation, A. Mandelbaum) New York: Bantam, 1982–86 (1st ed. c. 1305). The importance of Dante's writings for Michelangelo will form the major part of chapter 6. For the 'haidocentric' or 'diabolocentric' nature of the late Medieval universe, see Lovejoy, *Chain of Being*, p. 102; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 99.

[62]See R. J. M. Olson, 'Giotto's portrait of Halley's Comet,' *Scientific American* 240 (5) May 1979, pp. 134–142.

[63]Versions by Traini, Nardo di Cione and Signorelli, for example, do not adhere so closely to the layered format since they are spread over several areas. Other deviations from the norm at about this time are shown by the *Last Judgment* at S. Lorenzo, Genoa where the frescoes appear to be Byzantine in style but Italian in content (R. S. Nelson, 'A Byzantine Painter in Trecento Genoa: The *Last Judgment* at San Lorenzo,' *Art Bulletin*, 67 (4) Dec. 1985, pp. 548–566).

the scene's location in the vicinity of the east or altar wall became more frequent. It seems that, in order further to avoid the placement of Hell directly on the altar as it would be if it occurred at the lower edge of the altarpiece, it was often displaced from its central low position towards the viewer's right (that is, Christ's sinister). This arrangement had, of course, already taken place where no repositioning had occurred (as for example in French Medieval tympana), but the increasing use of altarpieces for the depiction of the Last Judgment provided an additional reason for the growing practice of separating the saved and damned respectively on Christ's dexter and sinister according to scriptural exegesis. This type of arrangement is evident in many fifteenth century Italian altarpieces and also northern versions: the example of the altarpiece by Fra Angelico/Zanobi Strozzi appears typical (fig. 45).[64]

A third possible reason for the less strict adherence to the traditional iconographic format of the Last Judgment by the end of the Medieval period, is the increased interest in the depiction of coherent, naturalistic space in the work of artists like Giotto, which was to become so important during the Renaissance. In addition, Giotto's more naturalistic approach may be argued as having influenced the arrangement of the figures without separation by banding. Modifications were also clearly made at Padua owing to the problematic architectural features, as mentioned. Christ is placed lower down because of the intrusive window. Hell is removed to the right of the doorway. Local architectural conditions overcome the by now less powerful traditional schema.[65]

By the sixteenth century, some variation and adaptation of Last Judgment iconography had therefore taken place in Italy since the Medieval age. It would be unreasonable, of course, to attribute this solely to increased questioning of

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[64]See also Appendix I, nos. 73, 74, 75 and 77. Most of the northern altarpieces (Appendix I, nos. 71, 72, 78, 81, 83, 85) also conform to this type.

[65]Michelangelo's fresco poses a unique problem in this context since, owing to the reverse orientation of the Sistine chapel, it is at the same time on the west as well as on the altar wall – an unusual position for a *Last Judgment* fresco. Figures are being propelled towards Hell which seems to exist 'off-stage' to the viewer's right but a 'cave' of Hell also appears to be curiously situated over the altar itself. This problem will be further discussed below, chapter 7, section v.

Biblical cosmology. Similarly, it would be difficult to attempt to trace a historically continuous identification between the composition of the scene of the Last Judgment and contemporary cosmology and maintain it in absolute terms of precise detail, but as far as the basic 'up/down' formula of pre-Renaissance cosmology is concerned, the correspondence undoubtedly exists. Some departures from the established 'world order' become evident and these adjustments in accordance with the growing debate on the traditional view of the cosmos provide a plausible precedent for Michelangelo's adjustment of the iconography of his own version of the Last Judgment scene in accordance, perhaps, with the increasing cosmological debate in the sixteenth century. In general terms, the traditional formula of a layered composition, dependent on the notion of ascent to Heaven and descent to Hell (and combined with the sinister/dexter division) still formed the basis for major versions of the scene when treated as a single image up to the sixteenth century.

Seen against this very strong tradition of previous depictions of the Last Judgment, Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel is seen to be of remarkable design. The earlier renderings of the Last Judgment dealt with above share, it has been noted, certain common ideas and features. Apart from the overall format and composition, basic themes are common to all. Whether the emphasis lies more on the salvation of the blessed or on the damnation of the lost, certain iconographic features are continually evident. As discussed above, the iconography is complex, as different events take place simultaneously on the picture format instead of in sequence and the whole is used as a vehicle for the exposition of very complex dogmatic thought at the very core of Christian belief. The ordering of the scene was thus achieved, as has been shown, by relating it to the current cosmological framework of the universe, developed primarily in superimposed, compartmentalized registers, and acting as metaphor for the fixed hierarchy of the universe and of the Christian Church.

Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel does contain the majority of the basic components of the traditional iconography – the Judging

Christ, the angels with the symbols of the Passion, the Virgin as intercessor, the Resurrection of the Dead, the act of Judgment and the fates of the saved and damned – but there is a startling change in the overall composition by comparison with the traditional arrangement or earlier Renaissance examples which have been discussed, because of the overriding circular emphasis as well as other unusual features. In Michelangelo's version, a group of trumpeting angels signifies the beginning of the train of events. On the lefthandside of the fresco, the resurrecting dead, some skeletal, some clothed, some naked, rise from their tombs. They are assisted by wingless angels, one group being pulled up by a rosary symbolising the power of prayer. Ranks of the saved are arranged around the dominating beardless Christ figure who gestures dramatically, while the Virgin Mary seems to crouch by his side. Certain saints, significantly without haloes, are ranged near to Christ and are nevertheless identifiable by their traditional attributes, such as the keys of St Peter, the animal–skin robe of John the Baptist, the grid of St Lawrence, the wheel of St Catherine, the flayed skin of St Bartholomew, which significantly bears Michelangelo's self–portrait,[66] and so on. The areas of the lunettes are filled with angels bearing the instruments of the Passion, while other groups of angels, on the righthandside of the fresco, forcibly reject the damned, figures full of despair and pathos, and hurl them towards Hell–fire. The cave of Hell is, strangely, depicted right over the altar on the centre of the lower edge.

In all this vast scheme of things, where his own innovation is combined with established tradition, it is true that Michelangelo does not totally abandon the concept of 'up' for Heaven and 'down' for Hell in his fresco, since the saved rise as the damned fall and Hell is at the lower level. Nor does Michelangelo abandon the right–left contrast of the traditional formula. There is some resemblance in general terms to the compositions at Padua and Torcello. Yet these aspects of the design are totally incorporated into the vast overall

[66]For details of this identification, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 44–45 and 118–119.

composition where circularity and circular motion receive the main emphasis. The Christ–centred circling movement is clearly superimposed upon, and warps into, the pattern of the familiar layers and divisions. The horizontal, hierarchical, tiers and compartments of the traditional iconography which contain the figures outlined above are subsumed into a series of revolving circular movements around the figure of Christ who, although still high up on the wall surface, is no longer at the summit of the composition but at its centre. Christ is depicted as beardless and 'Apollonian,' but relatively small in scale.[67] He appears in the centre of the composition with a somewhat disordered mêlée of saints, angels, saved and damned twisting and turning all around Him in a huge circular motion from the top to the bottom of the immense fresco.

[67]Michelangelo's Christ is relatively small in relation to other figures in the fresco and also in comparison with earlier examples of the Christ of the *Last Judgment*, where He is invariably over–sized. The figure is, nevertheless, completely dominating.

Chapter 4

Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*

> His Holiness answers by saying, 'Be of good heart,' for he has decided as soon as you return to Rome to work so well for you...and will give you a contract for such a thing as you have never yet dreamed of.
>
> Sebastiano del Piombo, Letter to Michelangelo, 17th July, 1533.[1]

i) The commission of the *Last Judgment*

Sebastiano del Piombo's enthusiastic letter to Michelangelo in Florence in July 1533, referring to a project which was 'such a thing as you have never yet dreamed of' is the earliest possible reference to the scheme to decorate the end wall of the Sistine Chapel.[2] Following this dating, it has convincingly been argued that the actual commission was subsequently arranged during a meeting between Pope Clement VII Medici and Michelangelo on 22nd September, 1533, at San Miniato al Tedesco, which was recorded by Michelangelo himself (see list of important dates, Appendix II).[3] Clement VII was travelling at this time to attend negotiations in

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[1]Translation by Murray (Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1984, p. 157), who quotes P. Barocchi and R. Ristori (ed.) *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, Florence, 1965–83, vol. 4, no. 910, for the original Italian which reads: '...Farvi a Roma de tal cossa che non ve lo sogniassi mai.' P. de Vecchi in Chastel et al, *The Sistine Chapel*, also draws attention to this document as evidence for the dating of the commission, p. 176.

[2]This is argued by Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 157; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 19; Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 176, among others. For factual data concerning Michelangelo's life and work, where innumerable sources could be cited, Tolnay and Murray will primarily be used, as well as the important primary sources in available editions, namely Ascanio Condivi's *Life of Michelangelo, 1553*; and Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, 1568*. For details see chapter 1 above.

[3]For example by Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 157; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol 5, p. 19 and n. 4 on p. 99; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 25; L. von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, (English version) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1901–28, vol. 10, p. 231; Michelangelo's *ricordo* is published by G. Milanesi, *Le Lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti*, Firenze: Le Monnier, 1875, p. 604; see also Chastel, et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, n. 3 on p. 268. There are no details of what precisely was discussed: there are virtually no documents concerning the actual planning or execution either of the ceiling frescoes or of the *Last Judgment*.

Frar nd did not return to Rome until December 1533. Michelangelo's hesitation about undertaking the commission has been indicated and he spent more time in Florence before he returned to Rome for good in 1534, just two days before the death of Clement VII on 25th September.[5] The new Pope, Paul III Farnese, confirmed the commission and in April 1535, scaffolding was erected in the chapel in order to prepare the wall surface for the *Last Judgment*. Michelangelo's decision to work in fresco instead of oils, as had first apparently been considered, resulted in a dispute and rift between the artist and Sebastiano del Piombo and made it necessary for the first preparatory surface coating to be removed again from the wall (January 1536). Thus the preparation of the wall according to Michelangelo's directions was finally completed in April 1536 and the painting was underway by that summer.[6] A Papal *breve* of 17th November 1536 stipulated that the commission should follow the cartoons already prepared under Clement VII.[7] The lowering of the scaffolding on 15th December 1540 indicates the date of completion of the upper part of the fresco. Michelangelo himself mentions the intensity of his work in a letter of 25th August, 1541, but delay was caused by an accident to the

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[4]For the marriage of Catherine de' Medici to the second son of the French king, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, p. 230.

[5]Michelangelo continued to work on the sculptures of the Medici chapel: he also still hoped to complete the commission for the ill–fated Julius tomb (Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, pp. 157–158; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 26; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol 5, n. 6 on p. 100). The *Last Judgment* project had certainly been determined before Michelangelo's final return to Rome in September 1534 and Clement's death; since Vasari alludes to the work as having been commissioned by Clement VII and 'inventions which had been decided' (Vasari, *Lives*, ed. de Vere, p. 1882; ed. Bull, p. 378). Condivi mentions '...a cartoon' and 'what he had already begun in Clement's time' (Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, pp. 75 and 83). Also, the project to paint the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel was mentioned in a letter by the Venetian envoy on 2nd March, 1534 (De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 25). For the date of Michelangelo's return to Rome, see his letter to Vasari of May 1557, Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 2, no. 434.

[6]For the dating of the preparation of the wall and scaffolding see De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, pp. 28–30; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 20–21; and F. Hartt, 'The Evidence for the Scaffolding of the Sistine Ceiling,' *Art History*, 5 (3) Sept. 1982, pp. 273–285. Note that three years had elapsed between the inception of the commission and the commencement of the painting in 1536.

[7]For Pope Paul's *motu proprio*, see De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 97. Vasari also comments that Paul III wanted Michelangelo to continue the work commissioned by Pope Clement (Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1882; (ed. Bull) p. 378).

artist.[8] The fresco was unveiled on the Eve of All Saints, 31st October 1541, when a celebratory Mass was said in the chapel by Pope Paul III, and seems to have been opened to a wider public the following Christmas.[9]

Owing to the reverse orientation of the Sistine Chapel,[10] the immense fresco (fig. 1) covers the west, altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. Its creation meant the destruction of works by fifteenth–century artists including Perugino and Michelangelo's own two frescoes in the lunettes which had been painted at the same time as the ceiling (fig. 4).[11] Two intrusive windows in the altar wall were blocked up and the wall surface was made to overhang very slightly. The finished fresco therefore covers an area of 13.7 x 12.2 metres (45 x 40 feet) and was the largest wall decoration originating as a single composition up to this time.[12] Its present condition is variable, owing to the effects of time, and dust and smoke from the altar candles, which has resulted in possible chemical changes or alteration of tonal values. It has also been affected by several well–intentioned attempts at alteration and restoration, beginning with the addition of draperies on some of the nude figures by Daniele da Volterra.[13] The current restoration and cleaning of the Sistine chapel has so far, at the time of writing, concentrated efforts on Michelangelo's work on the ceiling. It is expected that the cleaning and treatment of Michelangelo's *Last*

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[8]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1883; (ed. Bull) p. 380; see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol 5, p. 22 and De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, pp. 33–34, for details about the fresco's progress.

[9]Contemporary documentation, the Diary of the Sistine Chapel, is quoted by De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, n. 67 on p. 38. Vasari believed it was unveiled on Christmas day that year but expressed some uncertainty (Vasari, *Lives*, ed. de Vere, p. 1887; ed. Bull, p. 383). Although the main dedication of the chapel was to the Virgin, the celebration of the completion of the fresco seems appropriate to the Vigil of All Saints because of its relevance for the Last Day. The celebration of the ceiling frescoes had taken place on All Saints' Eve, 1512, which seems unlikely to have been a coincidence.

[10]Probably related to the reverse orientation of St Peter's itself, see J. Lees–Milne, *The Story of St Peter's Basilica in Rome*, London: Hamilton, 1967, and map, fig. 71.

[11]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 20 and fig. 44; Wilde, *Six Lectures*, fig. 154; see also R. Goffen, 'Friar Sixtus IV and the Sistine Chapel,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (2) Summer 1986, pp. 218–262.

[12]Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 124. Steinberg (L. Steinberg 'A Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' *Daedalus*, 109, 1980, p. 208 curiously refers to it as 'three thousand square feet of impending apocalypse' – 45x40=1800 square feet).

[13]Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 166.

Judgment on the end wall, begun in 1990 will be completed in the early 1990's.[14]

ii) Formal Analysis

Compared with earlier examples of the *Last Judgment*, outlined in the last chapter, Michelangelo's version of the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel evidently marks a distinct shift from the relatively traditional to the obviously innovative. Yet traditional and readily recognizable elements are also retained even while Michelangelo introduces innovative ideas in his own, unique approach to the subject.

Before considering the finished fresco itself, it is necessary, in order to trace the evolution of Michelangelo's design, to consider preliminary drawings for the composition of the *Last Judgment*. Michelangelo is known to have destroyed the majority of his drawings, although his motives for this are unclear. Various studies for the *Last Judgment* do remain, however, including several details of separate areas of the fresco and a few sketches of individual figures.[15] More significant in terms of the overall composition are two studies of the total format (figs. 50 and 51). The drawing in the Casa Buonarroti (fig. 50) shows that the traditional, tiered composition for a *Last Judgment* has been eliminated, although Michelangelo did not at first envisage the removal of all the existing decoration on the altar wall and he still allows a space for the existing altarpiece by Perugino.[16] Usually accepted as predating the Casa Buonarroti drawing, is the drawing in the Musée Bonnat,

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[14]For details of the cleaning and restoration, see Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo Rediscovered*, especially Foreword by C. Pietrangeli, pp. 6–7 and Appendix, pp. 260–265; A. Levy, 'All of Michelangelo's Work will have to be Restudied,' *Art News* 80 (8) Oct. 1981, pp. 114–121 (quoting restorer G. Colalucci, '...now we discover that the darkness was dirt...'); P. Corbett, 'After Centuries of Grime,' *Connoisseur*, May 1982, pp. 68–75; M. Kirby Talley, 'Michelangelo Rediscovered,' *Art News* 86 (6) Summer 1987, pp. 158–170; P. Elmer–DeWitt, 'Old Masters, New Tricks,' *Time Magazine*, December 18th 1989, pp. 50–51; D. Jeffery, 'The Sistine Restoration. A Renaissance for Michelangelo,' *National Geographic*, 176 (60) Dec. 1989, pp. 688–713; G. Hill, 'Judgement Day looms for Sistine restoration,' *The Times*, March 22nd 1990. A personal visit to the scaffolding in March 1989, found it in position at the altar end of the ceiling, from where the *Last Judgment* itself was clearly visible and close detail could be viewed with the aid of binoculars.

[15]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, figs. 132–147 and corresponding notes on p. 184f.

[16]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 24.

Bayonne, which is in general less well known (fig. 51). It is normally taken as dating from the very beginning of the commission, in 1533. In both sketches, the gesture of Christ is already determined, although He is more distinctly separated from the Virgin on His right than appears in the final version. More significantly, the Bayonne sketch clearly demonstrates that a circular composition around the central Christ was uppermost in the artist's mind from the earliest days of the commission. The figures are here quite definitely arranged in a circle around Christ and this has been commented on by observers like Goldscheider, Venturi, De Tolnay and, more recently, Hirst.[17] Lines envelop the composition in the shape of circles tipped back from the picture surface to form the basis of the design, but these seem to be marks in the paper itself, rather than part of the drawing.[18] The compositional emphasis in this preliminary sketch, however, remains circular, as in the final design. [19] Michelangelo's use of drawings as a method for evolving a composition is indicative of Michelangelo's creative procedures; a number of other designs and drawings for the overall scheme are of disputed attribution, or appear to be later copies. Other preliminary drawings of separate areas of the fresco are not relevant to the present discussion of the overall composition.[20]

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[17]L. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo. Selected Drawings*, London: Phaidon, 1966, catalogue no. 99, p. 58. He refers to it as 'the earliest extant drawing' and notes Thode's agreement. A. Venturi, *Michelangelo, his Life and Work*, Rome: Valori, 1928, p. 79, comments on 'the circle of martyrs.' De Tolnay (*Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 24) draws attention to 'the full circle' and, as a recent example, Hirst also comments on the circular arrangement (M. Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 51). Those who dispute the authenticity of the drawing are in the minority.

[18]These lines are described by M. Ducourau, Conservateur of the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne as '...marques dans la matière même du papier, qui sont visibles à la surface parfois en creux, parfois en relief.' (personal communication). It has not been possible to visit Bayonne to subject the drawing, especially these lines, to closer scrutiny.

[19]De Vecchi, in Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 182, curiously says that this drawing demonstrates a horizontal format which shows Michelangelo was 'at first thinking in terms of the traditional tiers.' He fails to comment on the obvious circular arrangement of figures around Christ, and, in addition only shows a portion (wider than it is tall) of the sheet. The actual dimensions of the sheet, according to the entry in the catalogue of the Musée Bonnat (no. 67), which are also quoted by De Vecchi, 344 or 345mm x 269mm, clearly show the sheet to be taller than it is wide which provides a completely different emphasis.

[20]The so-called 'Lely' drawing is questionable (catalogued in the Witt Library, London) as also the sketch in the Courtauld Institute (for which see *Burlington*

In the finished fresco in the Sistine Chapel, close formal analysis may usefully be applied to demonstrate the changes in Michelangelo's version of the *Last Judgment* from the traditional or established norm. Horizontal divisions may be detected in the work, but the process of the loosening up of the traditional tightly hierarchical scheme, which had already been started by Michelangelo's predecessors in the fifteenth century, as demonstrated, is carried to extremes. Superimposed on the traditional programme is the predominant motif of circular rather than horizontal divisions (see fig. 52). The overlaid lines indicate areas where the circularity is particularly apparent but the idea of circularity is more important than the exact placement of circles in the diagram. The divisions here broadly relate to the limits of the inner and outer circles. Circular movement around the central figure of Christ is emphasized, with groups of figures even situated above Him the wall, rather than a carefully layered, static structure. A strong underlying organisation was crucial to a work of this immense size and this seems to suggest that the scale of the wall to be decorated may have led Michelangelo to seek innovative compositional devices. Where earlier versions of the *Last Judgment*, such as Torcello and Padua (figs 20 and 36), had evidently been constructed and placed by means of the creation of a horizontal and vertical grid or network on the wall, in Michelangelo's case a new approach appears to have been explored which also utilized circles and diagonals in the method of actual composition on the wall surface. This, in turn, would have fitted in well with the introduction of new concepts in Last Judgment iconography, as will be demonstrated.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it would be unreasonable to maintain that Michelangelo totally rejected the existing traditions of Last Judgment iconography, as can be seen by a recognizable relationship with the compositions at

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Magazine, 18, July 1976, fig. 118). See also B. Barnes, 'A Lost Modello for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' *Master Drawings*, 26, 1988, pp. 239–248. For details of drawings relating to individual areas, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, figs. 132–147. It is interesting to note that there is a drawing of a Sun–symbol or star set in a dome on the verso of one of the studies in the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne (no. 681 verso) – referred to by De Tolnay as an 'unpublished astronomical drawing' *ibid.*, n. 174 on p. 185.

Torcello and Padua and by the continued use of the up–down and right–left contrasts of the traditional format. A vertical division between the blessed and the damned is suggested in the lower areas and horizontal divisions may be identified in the composition, corresponding with the lunettes, the band of figures containing Christ, the level below the cornice of the lateral walls and the lowest level across the altar (see figs. 1 and 52), but the horizontal and vertical divisions have now become activated. Set into motion, they are no longer static and self–contained but subsumed into the rotating circular movement of the whole design. The Christ–centred circling design clearly merges into these more traditional aspects of the *Last Judgment* format and overrides the familiar layers and divisions, and this has been recognized by both contemporary and later writers. Early observers like Condivi and Vasari, while acknowledging the existence of these divisions and other traditional elements, both comment on the great impact of the circular design of the fresco.[21] Modern writers as well, such as Wilde, observe that there is still some suggestion of the traditional horizontal levels and the areas of the Resurrection and Hell are still located at the lower edge of the fresco, but the circular emphasis is perceived as far greater.[22]

The immediate visual impact of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, is not, therefore, one of a predominantly hierarchical arrangement in successive levels from the top to the bottom of the format. The circular arrangement around the centrally placed figure of Christ is the major distinguishing feature. Christ's position is not central on the wall in precisely measurable terms, either right to left or top to bottom. He is positioned slightly to the viewer's left, evidently in order to counteract the strong directional movement in His pose which would make Him appear off–centre towards the viewer's right were he placed exactly centrally below the corbel of the vault. On the vertical axis, although Christ is

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[21]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, pp. 83f. and 87; Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) pp. 1863–1865; (ed. Bull) pp. 380–381. See section iii below for detailed discussion of the comments of Vasari and Condivi.

[22]J. Wilde, *Michelangelo. Six Lectures*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1978, p. 164. See section iv below, for full discussion of Wilde's analysis.

placed in a considerably higher position than would be necessary for any simple optical correction, He is not isolated at the top of the wall surface in the very highest position favoured traditionally, but in a position central to the masses of surrounding figures, so that, most unusually, the crowd arches above His head and there are many figures actually depicted above Him on the wall surface.[23] Thus in broad visual and compositional terms Christ is placed in the centre of the overall scheme with respect to the mass of figures of the fresco, arranged around Him.[24]

As an additional compositional means to the circle, used to concentrate attention on Christ, there are also a number of clear diagonals which produce a similar effect and which have also been observed by some critics (fig. 53).[25] The existence of diagonals in the scheme is particularly evident when considering the figures rising from the dead (on the viewer's left) and those falling (on the right). Diagonal movements towards Christ in the centre is, however, also to be observed in the arrangement of figures higher up, in the limbs of several of the saints and particularly the angels in the lunettes which again lean towards Christ. Thus Christ is made the focal point of the work through formal compositional and pictorial devices, rather than by means of a simple superior position on the wall surface. It may be suggested that there is, here, a possible relation with the Renaissance use of perspective to organize paintings, with the focal point of the composition frequently

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[23]Where figures were unusually positioned above Christ in earlier versions (eg. figs. 36 and 41) they were angelic beings rather than the masses of humanity. The centrality of Michelangelo's Christ would be emphasized to viewers in the eastern or 'lay' areas since the Chapel screen (originally situated one bay nearer to the altar, figs. 3, 4) would normally obscure the lower part of the altar wall. If Christ had been positioned any lower, the intervening screen would have caused Him to appear 'cut off' to viewers in those areas. Seen from the rear of the Chapel, the top of the screen lies just below the upper circular group. As the viewer moves towards the altar, Christ appears 'cut off' after the first bay, until He again becomes visible through the doorway of the screen. The original position of the screen closer to the altar would have lessened this type of cut–off effect even more.

[24]This will be demonstrated below, by means of a formal analysis, and corroborated by reference to the remarks of contemporary and modern observers, below, sections iii and iv. The formal analysis was deduced by means of the manipulation of transparencies marked with circles on a large–scale reproduction.

[25]As with the overlaid circles in fig. 52, the overlaid lines in the illustration serve simply to indicate the major areas of emphasis. Comments by other writers, like Wölfflin and Steinberg, on the diagonals in the fresco, will be discussed below, sections iii and v, and also in chapter 9.

aligning with the vanishing point. This approach, in Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgment*, forms a tremendous contrast with the traditional rather static scheme of the depiction of the Last Judgment which, as outlined above, was dependent upon a layered format, descending in strict order from Christ who was most often situated in Majesty at the very top of the design.

Close, detailed formal analysis of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* confirms its circular basis. Equally important as the circularity of the fresco's design, appears to be the motion connected with it, for the design appears to be rising at left and falling at right in a continuous movement. The revolving arms of Christ seem to generate the circularity and circular movement of the fresco and the significance of this gesture of Christ has received a great deal of attention and been subject to different interpretations (fig. 54). It possibly signifies a blessing and a curse simultaneously, in the same way perhaps that Michelangelo's bronze statue of Julius II at Bologna (now destroyed) was suggested to have done.[26] In this context, it is important to note the original position of Christ's thumb on His left hand (visible in a detail, fig. 55). Taken in conjunction with His middle finger, this is suggestive of the gesture of blessing; and this is the hand which points towards the wound and Christ's redemptive suffering. Form and meaning are combined as Christ's gestures are used to relate to the iconography as well as the composition; the damned fall by His gesture of condemnation and the saved are drawn up. The arrangement of Christ's arms in a swastika-like formation (fig. 55) could perhaps be a reference to this form of Sun-symbol which was known from pre-Christian times and had been readily adopted by the Christians.[27] Christ's central position is accentuated by the golden light which surrounds Him like a mandorla, but its resemblance to a circular sun is more striking than any correspondence with the shape of a traditional

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[26]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1855; (ed. Bull) p. 349.

[27]See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 9, p. 712; J. G. Frazer, *The Worship of Nature*, London: Macmillan, 1926, vol. 1, p. 608; J. Baltrusaitis, 'Quelques Survivances du Symbole Solaires dans l'Art du Moyen Age,' *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 17, 1937, pp. 75–82.

abstracted type of mandorla or radiance.[28]

Around Christ, the various figures, saints and apostles, saved and damned, apparently form and come together out of the space surrounding Christ, who appears according to the Biblical description in Luke 21:27, '...And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.' Two distinct circles are created as the basis for the arrangement of the composition with areas of void or 'infinity' in between.[29] Detailed examination of the figures shows how they are positioned in order to fit in with the two major circular masses. For example, on the inner circle, (fig. 54) the figure of St John the Baptist to the left of Christ is carefully composed so that his torso and limbs follow the curve of a circle (fig. 56). The subtle drawing back of his right leg, and the foreshortening of the calf demonstrate that the circular composition was contrived and intentional. The figure of St Peter, to the right of Christ, is similarly formed in almost a mirror image, with curved back and leg foreshortened in a very similar manner (fig. 57). Other examples of a contrived curve in the figures are to be found within the inner circle, and the arrangement of minor characters continues the formation. The inner circle of figures is completed around Christ's shoulders and above His head at the top, whilst the grille of St Lawrence and the leaning pose of St Bartholomew complete the suggestion of this circle at the bottom, below Christ's feet (fig. 58).[30] The inner

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[28]E. Hall and H. Uhr, '*Aureola super Auream.* Crowns and related Symbols in Late Gothic and Renaissance Iconography,' *Art Bulletin*, 67 (4) Dec. 1985, pp. 568–603. The presence of a circular halo of light, a nimbus or mandorla, in previous examples of the *Last Judgment* (as in figs. 33 and 36) is acknowledged (and even the fact that angelic figures were sometimes incorporated into this frame), but the idea that the circularity is simply derived from the mandorla or nimbus appears to be an inadequate explanation of this major work.

[29]De Tolnay refers to these areas as representative of infinity (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 30), but Hartt later commented, 'The airy background of the fresco of course should not be construed as infinity, the notion of infinite space occurred to no–one in the 1530's,' (F. Hartt, *Michelangelo*, New York: Abrams, 1964, p. 50). The inaccuracy of Hartt's comment is clearly demonstrated by the scientific literature; see, for example, E. Grant, 'Medieval and Seventeenth–century Conceptions of an Infinite Void Space beyond the Cosmos,' *Isis*, 60, 1969, pp. 39–60, and G. McColley, 'Nicholas Copernicus and the Infinite Universe,' *Popular Astronomy*, 44, 1936, pp. 525–535. In 1277 an episcopal edict banned Aristotle's writings because he said the universe was *finite*. This discussion will be further developed in chapter 8, Scientific Sources.

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circle is lent further emphasis by the surrounding void.

It is interesting to consider that the circle of figures around Christ may also be read as being slightly tipped back into space away from the picture plane, which tends to give it the appearance of an ellipse on the surface of the wall. This reading of the composition offers another example of Michelangelo's subtle adaptation of traditional concepts into his innovatory design. For, if the circle of lesser figures immediately surrounding Christ is read as tipped back at an angle to the picture plane (an effect reinforced by their decreasing scale), then Christ's position in their centre may be regarded as being elevated above them in the conventional manner. The inner circle of figures may be read as being situated *below* Christ (or at about waist height) in space, at the same time as being quite clearly positioned *above* Him in the circle described on the actual vertical surface of the wall. Since the figures in the inner circle surrounding Christ may thus plausibly be read in both these ways, Michelangelo may be said to innovate without defying tradition outright.

Contemporary projectional theory, in which Michelangelo must have been versed,[31] corroborates this idea of the combination of two views of the circle. The awareness, here, that a circle projected at an angle forms an ellipse appears consonant with Michelangelo's reliance on mathematical theorems elsewhere in his work.[32] The position of the figures relative to Christ is the key factor for this hypothesis and, in spite of the subtle ambiguities suggested above, there seems little doubt that, relative to Christ, the figures are arranged in a circle around a central

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figures, especially the triangle or pyramid (such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1483–5, or his *Adoration of the Magi*, 1481, where the format is based on interlocking triangle and semi-circle). Mannerist painting favoured less stable compositional structures, such as the oval or lozenge, but the use of a strictly circular format was unusual (as with Corregio's circular compositions at Parma, 1520's).

[31]See W. M. Ivins, *Art and Geometry, A Study in Space Institutions*, New York: Dover, 1964, especially chapter 6; S. Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, New York: Basic Books, 1975; J. White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, London: Faber and Faber, (3rd ed.) 1987, and below, chapter 9.

[32]Especially in his architectural work. See J. S. Ackermann, *The Architecture of Michelangelo*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970; C. Pirina, 'Michelangelo and the Music and Mathematics of his Time', *Art Bulletin*, 67 (3), 1985, pp. 368–382. In particular the dome of St Peter's and the designs for the Campidoglio are evidently as much concerned with mathematics and physics as with aesthetics.

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point – both in the two–dimensional composition on the real wall surface and in the fictive, pictorial space of the fresco.

Although the outer circle of figures around Christ may also be read as slightly tipped back into space in the same way (in the areas immediately below the lunettes), it is primarily perceived on the vertical wall–surface (fig. 59). This outer circle is formed in the same way as the inner, by the use of curved and foreshortened limbs, as well as by the overall grouping of the figures as in, for example, the carefully curved bodies of the mother and child on the left, or the cross of the figure customarily identified as St Simon the Cyrene on the right–hand edge of the work. The circular motif, together with the idea of its implied movement, is continued across the lunettes; on the left by the placing of the Cross which is unusually and dramatically foreshortened, and on the right where the column of the flagellation is likewise diagonally placed (virtually in mirror image) so as to complete the circular format across the top of the two lunettes (figs. 60 and 61). Here, two traditional iconographic elements (the cross and the column), which were often included in versions of the *Last Judgment*, are both used in an unusual manner in order to reinforce the compositional form. The foreshortened limbs of the angel supporting the central part of the column and the position of the angel who is twisted around the cross, with foreshortened leg tucked well in, also serve to emphasize the underlying circular composition in this area. It seems appropriate that the Cross, symbol of Christ's suffering but also His victory, suggests the upward movement, while the column of His pain and humiliation plummets downward.

The outer circle (indicated in fig. 52) is tightly closed lower down by the group of angels with trumpets,[33] although their trumpets splay outward, suggestive of the Biblical reference to the four corners of the earth (Revelations 8:2–9). Within

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[33]The curious number of angels in this group (11), which has been commented upon by Steinberg ('Corner of *Last Judgment*,' p. 257) and others, is accounted for by the inclusion of the seven angels of the Apocalypse (Revelations 1:20 and chapters 15–17), two angels holding the books of life and death (Revelations:12) and the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. St Michael, identifiable as the largest central angel, was a 'chief actor in the scene of Judgment' (Mâle, *Gothic Image*, p. 376) and, of course, Michelangelo's own namesake.

this group, the poses of various angels and even the positions of the books fit in with the circularity of the design (fig. 62). The group also serves as a linking feature between the 'rising' figures on the left and the groups of figures falling towards Hell on the right (figs. 63 and 64). Some of the sinners here bear the 'instruments' of their crimes and suffer relevant punishment in a way often depicted in Medieval versions of the *Last Judgment* (like the usurer weighed down by his money); their number and precise relevance to the 'Seven Deadly Sins' also suggests a reference to Clement's earlier scheme for a bronze group of this subject.[34] Together with the predominance of the angels' trumpets sloping towards the viewer's left, these groups are important for their contribution towards the suggested motion of the circular format in a clockwise direction for the entire composition. The only exception is the group of figures, in the bottom right hand corner, which are being propelled down and out of the picture space to the viewer's right.

Where the colour or tonal (as opposed to linear) analysis of the work is concerned, very similar conclusions may be reached, in spite of difficulties caused by deterioration and discolouration of the fresco, which may very soon be rectified by cleaning and restoration. The central emphasis lies on Christ, and His light flesh tones, coupled with the golden aura around Him, form the core of the design (see figs. 1 and 52). The space surrounding this contrasts with the darker circle of figures, then another lighter area of clouds and 'infinite space' follows, before the outer rim of darker figures. This is over and above the conventional lighting of figures from the south range of windows. Tonal contrast is thus used to re-emphasize the circular composition.[35]

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[34]Discussed by Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' pp. 53–54.

[35]The concept of Michelangelo as a colourist has received increasing attention as a result of the Sistine restorations (cf. n. 14 above). The clear bright colours now seen on the ceiling are emphasized by Talley, 'Michelangelo Rediscovered,' *passim*, and the traditional concept of the master's subdued palette appears to have been the result of deterioration. Beck, quoted *ibid.*, p. 168, voiced some objections to the ceiling's post-restoration appearance but he appears to be in a minority. It seems reasonable to assume, at this stage, that the restoration and cleaning of the *Last Judgment* on the altar wall will reveal similar evidence of Michelangelo's prowess in the use of bright light and colour. While revelations concerning Michelangelo's variations of hue, in blues, greens, reds etc., which may be forthcoming are less pertinent to this hypothesis, his use of light and dark tonal contrasts as a basis for

The overall view of the fresco as based on two circular masses with Christ at the centre thus appears to be strongly in evidence. Also noticeable is the apparent motion of the circular basis of the design. The circles are used to set in motion the dramatic content of the fresco, beginning, as has been pointed out, with the arrangement of Christ's arms and extending to the system revolving around Him. Although the overall format has been commented upon from the time of Vasari and Condivi, an explanation of the underlying circular, moving composition has rarely been considered in depth.

iii) Previous Interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*

Discussion of Michelangelo's artistic production has long been a major subject of art historical research and even controversy, especially bearing in mind the fresco's medium, scale, location and date.[36] In particular the key work of the *Last Judgment*, in its important place in the Sistine chapel, has been the subject of much debate concerning its philosophical or theological meaning, hidden or otherwise. Previous interpretations of Michelangelo's fresco have tended to emphasize the dramatic mood of the Judgment of Mankind or the formal qualities of the artist's skill in the depiction of the nude. Other important recurring themes to come under discussion, apart from the overall composition, have included consideration of the meaning of Christ's gesture and facial expression, the significance of His beardlessness and His ambiguous sitting, standing or striding position. The demeanour of the Virgin Mary has also been an important factor in determining the message or meaning of the work.

The exercise of a formal analysis may be used, as above, to demonstrate the

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the composition could well be further emphasized.

[36]As Murray points out (Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 233), the Michelangelo Bibliography of 1927 by E. Steinmann and R. Wittkower lists 2107 items on the artist and his works, and the supplement up to 1970 by L. Dussler lists a further 2220 items. However, the present study will concentrate on major interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and the most significant lines of argument, which will be assessed in this section. Space obviously does not allow, nor would it serve any purpose, to include a full discussion of all previous references to the work.

singularity of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and the basis of its design on circularity and circular motion around Christ. This feature, however, may also be demonstrated and confirmed by the comments of previous critics of the fresco. The significant change in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* from the well–established traditional formula as outlined in chapter 3, to his own totally original design, has been commented upon in numerous interpretations of the fresco, from his contemporaries in the sixteenth century to the most recent scholarship. A discussion of previous interpretations and observations concerning the fresco therefore lends weight to the present perception of the fresco as a rotating circular design with cosmological symbolic content, and an assessment of previous interpretations of the fresco will also provide a background against which the present interpretation may be considered.

The first recorded reaction to the completed fresco was that of Pope Paul III who, on the unveiling of the fresco, spontaneously fell to his knees, overwhelmed by the drama of the scene and the emotion it aroused in him concerning his own fate and salvation.[37] The earliest specifically art historical discussions of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* are those of his contemporaries, Vasari and Condivi. In both editions of Vasari and in Condivi's text (probably written under close supervision of Michelangelo himself), the general approach and main emphasis of the interpretation is placed on the fresco as depicting the wide range of human attitudes in the physical depiction of the nude form.[38] Vasari comments on Michelangelo's portrayal of the human form in perfect proportion and 'most varied attitude.'[39] Strong emphasis is also placed on the range of emotions depicted at the time of

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[37]See Goldscheider, *Michelangelo*, p. 20. Perhaps the manner of Paul III's election to the cardinalate (his sister was Pope Alexander VI Borgia's mistress) and his illegitimate children caused him to have a guilty conscience (G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe, 1517–1559*, London: Fontana, 1971, pp. 186–187 and 253). The first reaction to the incomplete fresco, recorded by Vasari, was that of Biagio da Cesena, who objected to the nudity in the work. As a result, Michelangelo supposedly gave his features to the figure of Minos in Hell (Vasari, *Lives*, ed. de Vere, p. 1883; ed. Bull, p. 379).

[38]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1882–1887; (ed. Bull) pp. 378–383; Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, pp. 75–87.

[39]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1884; (ed. Bull) p. 380.

Christ's Judgment; for example, Condivi describes the anger of Christ as he 'wrathfully damns the guilty' and 'gently gathers the righteous,' while Vasari comments on the depiction of the 'passions and affectations of the soul.'[40] Both Vasari and Condivi also emphasize traditional iconographical elements which seem to fit in with the more customary approach to the scene, such as the inclusion of the angels of the apocalypse with the Book of Life, the raising of the dead, the role of the Judge and the fate of the saved and the damned. The attributes of the saints and apostles, for identification, are also discussed. Biblical sources are suggested by these early biographers as mainly the Apocalypse of St John, Ezekiel 37 and Dante's *Inferno*.[41]

Alongside Vasari's and Condivi's recognition of such traditional features in the fresco are their important comments on its unusual format which is based on a circular design. As far as the overall composition was concerned, both Vasari and Condivi viewed Michelangelo's fresco as lying at least partly within the traditional framework of horizontal and vertical divisions. Condivi describes the fresco: 'The whole is divided into sections, left and right, upper, lower and central' and Vasari also commented on the way in which certain figures are dragged down toward Hell while others fly toward Heaven. Both writers continue their descriptions, however, with references to the central position of Christ and the observed circular format around Him. Condivi adds, significantly, that 'in the central section, the blessed who are already resurrected form a *circle* or crown in the clouds of the sky around the Son of God,' and Vasari also notes, 'In a *circle* around the figure of Christ are innumerable prophets and apostles.'[42] This confirms the most evident visual perception of the fresco as being based on a circular design centred on Christ and shows the acceptance and obviousness of the idea of the circle in the very earliest

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[40]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, pp. 84–87; Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1884; (ed. Bull) p. 380.

[41]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, pp. 83–87; Vasari, *Lives* (ed. de Vere) p. 1884–1886 (ed. Bull) p. 381f.

[42]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1884–1885; (ed. Bull) p. 380–381; Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 84 [emphasis mine].

criticism of the fresco.

Early copies of the work tend to reinforce this perception. Venusti's painted copy, 1549 (fig. 65), and engraved versions by della Casa, 1543, Giovanni Baptista de' Cavalieri, 1567, Beatrizet, 1562, and Rota, 1569 (fig. 66), also show an emphasis on the circular arrangement around the Sun–Christ.[43] The engraving by Rota in particular quite clearly demonstrates that contemporary observers perceived Christ in terms of a Sun–symbol, set in the middle of a bright circle of light, emphasised by the radiating rays of the sun. Until the cleaning of the fresco is complete, this type of early copy can probably give a more accurate impression of the fresco's brightness than the descriptions of later centuries which refer to the dark overall effect and the 'muddy colours.' Comments by observers like Vasari and Condivi and the evidence shown by early copies should also be compared with De Tolnay's comment that credits Riegl (1908) with the first perception of the circular analysis of the work, overlooking the comments of these contemporaries of Michelangelo.[44]

It seems likely that Vasari and Condivi noted the circular composition and commented on it because it was a novel approach and a significant departure from the traditional formula of the *Last Judgment*. Although the circular emphasis of Michelangelo's design received little additional comment until the twentieth century, it has evidently influenced several later versions of the *Last Judgment*. The subject became increasingly rare after Michelangelo but versions by artists like, among others, Pontormo 1546 (fig. 67), Herman tom Ring 1555, Vasari 1560 (fig. 68), Bastianino 1580, Tintoretto 1589 (see sketch, fig. 69), and even Rubens 1615 (fig. 70) were also based on a distinctly circular design, suggesting that Michelangelo's conspicuous circular format for the *Last Judgment* had become totally accepted and had in fact formed the basis of a 'new' tradition.[45]

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[43]For details of these and other reproductions, see especially De Tolnay, vol. 5, figs. 257–259; Steinberg, 'Corner of *Last Judgment*,' figs. 13–16, and A. Chastel, *A Chronicle of Italian Renaissance Painting*, New York: Hacker, 1983, pp. 196–199.

[44]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 126, who quotes A. Riegl, *Die Enstehung der Barockkunst in Rom* (1908).

[45]For details and references see Appendix I, nos. 99–108 (Tintoretto's *Paradiso* is listed as a *Last Judgment* by Réau, *Iconographie*, p. 756). For details and further

Apart from discussion concerning the overall composition of the fresco, another line of interpretation of the painting also found expression during the early days, beginning soon after the unveiling of the fresco. In spite of the enthusiasm of some writers like Porrino (1541), Sernini (1541), Martelli (1541) and Doni (1543),[46] at an early stage, adverse criticism was also evident, which attacked in particular the inappropriateness of the nudity in the fresco.[47] The existence of opposition to the fresco was commented upon by Sernini as early as November 1541, but its main early proponents were Pitti (1545) and Aretino (1545).[48] Aretino's correspondence with Michelangelo over the fresco and his suggestions for the design are well known. In 1537, when the design must have been established and the actual painting commenced, he wrote to Michelangelo, referring to the subject as 'the end of the universe,' and commenting on the idea of portraying Christ 'blazing with rays' and 'ringed round with splendours and terrors.'[49] Having been snubbed by a somewhat sarcastic and evasive reply from Michelangelo, Aretino in 1545 began a bitter attack on the depiction of what he saw as indecency and nudity in the fresco.[50] He found it

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examples, see also R. De Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, Rome: Laterza, 1978, plates 8–13; and O. Benesch, *The Art of the Renaissance in Northern Europe*, London: Phaidon, 1965, pp. 145–161, *passim*. De Maio includes several examples which are so close to Michelangelo's as to be considered 'copies' rather than influenced by him.

[46]For references to Porrino (Sonnet for the unveiling of the *Last Judgment*, 1541), Sernini (letter to Cardinal Gonzaga, 19th November, 1541), Martelli (letter to Michelangelo, 4th December, 1541) and Doni (letter to Michelangelo, 21st January, 1543) see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 613f., and E. Camesasca, *Michelangelo, Complete Paintings*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, p. 12.

[47]For further details of Counter–Reformation objections to the fresco, see De Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, pp. 17–45, 65–108 and Chastel, *Chronicle*, chapter 9.

[48]Pitti (letter to Vasari, 1st May 1545) referred to 'a thousand heresies' (Camesasca, *Complete Paintings*, p. 12). Aretino's correspondence concerning the *Last Judgment* is reproduced in H. W. Janson (ed.) *Italian Art 1500–1600. Sources and Documents*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966, pp. 56–59, 123–125, and discussed by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 46.

[49]Aretino, letter to Michelangelo, dated 16th September, 1537, quoted in Janson, *Sources and Documents*, p. 57.

[50]In Nov. 1545, Aretino described the work as 'an impiety of irreligion...in the greatest temple built to God...things in front of which brothels would shut their eyes' (Janson, *Sources and Documents*, pp. 122–123). In view of Aretino's own notorious licentiouness, this appears somewhat hypocritical. It also overlooks the fact that nudity was not unusual in the *Last Judgment*, although usually of the damned rather than saved. See Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, pp.

completely unsuitable for a major religious work in the Papal chapel and this line of argument, which was taken up by others,[51] was eventually responsible for the overpainting of parts of the fresco in 1564 by Daniele da Volterra, 'the breeches maker.'[52] The long–standing argument or line of criticism, which viewed the fresco simply as a 'compendium of human anatomy,' and blamed the artist for putting his art before the religious and spiritual interpretation of the subject, contrasts with the approach taken by Vasari and Condivi, in answer to these critics, concerning the depiction of the nude in the fresco which is viewed by them in a totally positive light and highly praised from the artistic point of view.

Aretino led the reaction against the nude in the fresco as unseemly but it is significant that in his criticism, although hostile in its condemnation of nudity, he did recognise the importance of the immense work and also that it contained hidden meaning – 'the greatest mysteries of human and divine philosophy.'[53] On seeing 'the complete sketch of the whole of your Day of Judgement,' Aretino also grasped the cosmological implications of the work. For he wrote to Michelangelo, in November 1545, 'When you set about composing your *picture of the universe and hell and heaven...*' [my italics], and he also suggested utilizing the 'rays of the sun,' ('raggi di sole') which were clearly evident, to cover the nudity of the blessed.[54] This demonstrates that the traditional relationship between the depiction of the Last Judgment and the perceived view of the universe was undoubtedly carried on in Michelangelo's version of the subject – and that this was a matter immediately

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159–162, for further comment on this correspondence.

[51]The writer of an anonymous letter to Pope Paul III attacked the fresco and accused the artist of heresy and 'Lutheran fantasies' in 1549 (Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 616; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 165).

[52]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 98. Later overpaintings may be determined by comparing the work with the copy made by Venusti in 1549, fig. 65. (See De Campos, *Michelangelo*, plates 62 and 65 for diagrammatic comparisons).

[53]Quoted above, Preface. See R. J. Clements, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, London: Owen, 1966, p. 30, and D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 9 and 19, for Michelangelo's reputation for the inclusion of hidden meanings in his works.

[54]Aretino, letter to Michelangelo, dated November 1545 (cited, Janson, *Sources and Documents*, pp. 122–124). See also Chastel, *Chronicle*, p. 195.

recognized by contemporaries, even amongst those not kindly disposed towards the artist.

Consideration of early reactions to the fresco thus demonstrates that there was already an awareness of the circular basis of the design amongst contemporaries, Aretino as well as Vasari, Condivi, and early copyists. It is also shown that the cosmological significance of the scene as the symbolic depiction of the physical universe was recognized by at least one critic, Aretino.

Related, perhaps, to the movement of the strict Counter–Reformation[55] later sixteenth–century critics, like Dolce (1557)[56] and Gilio (1564),[57] also criticized the fresco as amoral and laid their main emphasis on the fact that Christ was beardless and too young and that Michelangelo had apparently put art before religion. Yet Gilio too recognized the correspondence between the depiction of Christ and the sun.[58] The reputation of 'the Divine Michelangelo' and agitation by the fresco's supporters (such as Anton Francesco Doni, 1543; the Florentine Academy, 1564; Lomazzo, 1590)[59] saved it from destruction, however, in spite of opposition from

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[55]For the possible relationship between the fresco and the Counter–Reformation, see De Campos, *Michelangelo*, pp. 80–85, where it is argued that the pessimistic theme of judgment was directly concerned with the Counter–Reformation atmosphere. The fresco (completed by 1541) predates the period of the Counter–Reformation proper which, at the earliest can only be said to date from 1542 (inauguration of the Roman Inquisition) or 1545 (first session of the Council of Trent). For Counter–Reformation reaction to Michelangelo's fresco see also Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, pp. 165–167; A. Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1660*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 112–113; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 618. The fresco was specifically discussed in the third session of the Council of Trent (1563).

[56]L. Dolce, *Dialogo della Pittura*, quoted by Camesasca, *Michelangelo*, p. 13. Dolce also interestingly states, 'only the scholars understand the profundity of the allegories which they [the nudes] conceal.' See also Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 617.

[57]For Gilio, *Due Dialogi* and *Errori dei Pittori*, 1564, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5 pp. 123–124; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 165; Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, pp. 112–114; and De Maio, *Michelangelo*, especially chapter 1.

[58]G. A. Gilio, *Trattato, 1563*, cited by B. Barnes, *The Invention of Michelangelo's Last Judgment* (PhD, University of Virginia) Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1986, p. 101. Paleotti (1582) made the association with Apollo (see *ibid.*).

[59]Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, p. 164; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 123. Michelangelo's acquaintance with Doni is confirmed by a letter written to him by Doni in January 1543 (quoted by Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, p. 164).

powerful reformers like Pope Paul IV Carafa.[60] Lomazzo was appreciative of the fresco's depiction of the range of human emotion in addition to the physical description of human form. He noted the wrathfulness of Christ – a point which was later to come very much under discussion in various significant interpretations of the fresco. Although several early writers had commented upon the anger of Christ[61] and this became an accepted approach to the interpretation of the fresco, the attitude of Christ (His gesture, general posture and facial expression) came to be questioned in the twentieth century by De Tolnay and Steinberg among others.[62] In the intervening centuries, from the sixteenth to the twentieth, most interpretations followed a rather similar pattern of discussion of Michelangelo's dramatic depiction of the Last Judgment, the major concern being the expressive use of the nude or semi–nude human body in order to convey the range of emotions of the scene.

During the Enlightenment critics outside Italy, exemplified by Fréart (writing in 1662), Roger de Piles (1699), Richardson (1728), and Mengs (1785), followed similar lines of criticism in their interpretations, as did Milizia in Italy itself (1797).[63] Like Aretino and Gilio they criticized the fresco as a mere compendium of the human form which placed 'Art' before religion. Winckelmann (1717–66)[64] disliked Michelangelo's work in general, but, with the classical revival in the late

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[60]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1904; (ed. Bull) p. 402, tells how, on hearing that Pope Paul IV wished to alter the work, Michelangelo commented that the Pope should first set the world to rights; to adjust the painting was a trivial matter. See also Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, p. 166. In contrast to the attitude of members of the Rome Inquisition, the fresco was defended in 1573 by the Venetian Inquisition (Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 619).

[61]For example, Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1884; (ed. Bull) p. 380, 'His stern and terrible countenance.' Of later writers, Venturi's reference to Christ's 'menacing gesture' (Venturi, *Michelangelo*, p. 77) appears typical.

[62]Condivi had already noted the duality of Christ's attitude, namely, that He 'wrathfully damns the guilty but gently gathers the righteous' (Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 84). See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 122–123; Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy', pp. 49–50. Twentieth–century interpretations of the fresco will be discussed more fully in the next section.

[63]For details of this critical history, see Camesasca, *Michelangelo*, p. 13; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 123–127 (which will be referred to especially where the original texts are difficult of access).

[64]J. J. Winckelmann, *Essay on the Beautiful in Art* (1763), in D. Irwin (ed.) *Winckelmann's Writings on Art*, London: Phaidon, 1972, pp. 44, 89–104.

eighteenth century, other critics were once more in favour of the fresco. Diderot (1713–84) and Reynolds (1723–92)[65] both extended their appreciation of Michelangelo specifically to this work, and Goethe, in 1786, commented on the *Last Judgment* as 'a most grand and amazing performance' with 'inner certainty, force, grandeur' and 'the eye of a genius.'[66] Following this, the Romantics, Stendhal (1817) and Delacroix (1830, 1837),[67] recognized the grandeur of the artist's vision. Paraphrasing Condivi and Vasari, they commented on the fresco as 'the compendium of the attitudes of the human form,' but they also demonstrated an awareness that the nude form was being specifically used in order to render the emotions (or attributes) of the Soul – that is, the joy of the blessed, the despair of the damned and the wrath of Christ Himself. Delacroix in particular was conscious of the figures' appropriateness in the scene depicted and the 'sublime nature' of the single, unified design.[68] In describing the eleven groups he perceived in the painting, Stendhal detected a rising and falling movement from the left to the right and rising again in the centre to culminate at Christ in almost a spiral fashion. Delacroix was also aware of movement and the fact that there was an underlying compositional grouping which strengthened the design. Both these Romantics viewed Dante as a major source (to be further discussed in chapter 6 below).

Nineteenth–century interest in the fresco was also shown by Lenoir (1820) who stressed the stylistic interpretation of it as 'an expression of dynamic unity.'[69] In the middle of the nineteenth century, Burckhardt (1855)[70] appreciated the fresco's

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[65]B. C. Tollemache (ed.), *Diderot's Thoughts on Art and Style*, New York: Franklin, 1971, reprint of 1893 ed.), pp. 62, 82, 96; J. Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* (ed. R. R. Wark), New York: Collier, 1966, Discourse 15 (1790), pp. 242–248.

[66]W. Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (1786), cited in Camesasca, *Michelangelo*, p. 13, and E. Carli, *All the Paintings of Michelangelo*, London: Oldbourne, 1963, p. 39.

[67]For discussion of criticism by Stendhal and Delacroix, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 124–125; also H. Stendhal, *Voyages en Italie*, (1829), Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1973, pp. 1133–1136.

[68]E. Delacroix, *Revue de Paris* (1830) and 'Sur le Jugement Dernier' in *Oeuvres Litteraires* (1837), for which see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 125.

[69]Lenoir 'Observations sur le Genie de Michel Ange,' *Annales Françaises des Arts* (1820), cited, *ibid.*, p. 124.

[70]See J. Burckhardt, *Der Cicerone*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1893 ed., vol. 3, p. 751f; see also *idem.*, *Civilisation of the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. New York: Dover, 1975,

inspiration and expression of 'poetical ideas,' but he continued the traditional criticism of the fresco as irreligious and un–Christian in terms of its emphasis on the naked human body. Wölfflin (1898)[71] also criticized Michelangelo's work as taking too much pleasure in the nude and emphasizing the physical rather than the spiritual, although he did recognize the grandiose nature of the project. Compositionally, he viewed the fresco in terms of two strong diagonals meeting at Christ (compare fig. 53), thus presenting a formal analysis of the fresco in addition to his comment on its content and theological meaning.

Adverse criticism of the famous work, in a key position in Christendom, continued with Ruskin's dismissal of Michelangelo's works as 'dishonest, insolent and artificial' in 1872.[72] In the same year Symonds, commenting on the powerful expression of the athletic nudes, criticized them for not being spiritual enough. He did detect that the fresco had an 'underlying mathematical severity,' and regarded the figure of Christ as an 'Apollo' in the same way as De Tolnay was later to do.[73] Berenson (1896)[74] similarly expressed the idea that the 'power' of the nude figures was not really spiritual enough as far as the 'message' of the fresco was concerned but he significantly recognized the importance of the fresco as 'the depiction of the moment before the universe disappears' and as 'a blast of energy,' thereby unconsciously perhaps returning to the idea of cosmological significance in the fresco which had already been mentioned by Michelangelo's contemporary, Aretino.

iv) Twentieth–century criticism

In the early twentieth century, criticism of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*

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vol. 1, p. 172.

[71]H. Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, London: Phaidon, 1953, pp. 197–198.

[72]J. Ruskin, *The Relations between Michel Angelo and Tintoret*, London, 1872; see also *idem.*, *Diaries*, (ed. J. Evans), Oxford: Clarendon, 1956, vol. 3, pp. 797, 882.

[73]J. A. Symonds, *Life of Michelangelo*, New York: Modern Library, 1892, p. 338f. At about the same time, Pastor also referred to the circular design and the 'Apollo'–like Christ (*History of the Popes*, pp. 626 and 629).

[74]Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, London: Phaidon, reprint 1967, pp. 72–77. Berenson regarded the *Last Judgment* as a 'failure', p. 76.

iv) Twentieth–century criticism

In the early twentieth century, criticism of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* included discussion of potential source material, but the formal analysis of the composition of the work as a whole also received attention. Steinmann (1905) stressed the importance of Dante as a source for the fresco, and Thode (1902–13) placed greater emphasis on the Bible and the *Dies Irae* of Thomas a Celano, while still adhering to the notion of the fresco as a 'compendium of human anatomy.'[75] Looking at the format of the composition of the fresco as a whole instead of concentrating on the 'compendium of human anatomy' in the individual figures, Riegl (1908) emphasized the revolving circular movement around Christ, whom he described as 'vengeful.'[76] Justi (1909) attacked the traditional idea, originating with Vasari, that the main aim of the fresco was to display the artist's mastery of the human body by maintaining that this was only used with the aim of bringing the iconographical meaning to a level of human understanding. Justi emphasized the dramatic unity of the painting and stressed the innovative aspects of the design in the movement rising on the left and falling on the right, which appeared to him to overri[illegible] three major traditional zones.[77]

During the twentieth century, in line with an increasingly interpretative approach to art history, writers began to look beyond the stylistic or formal appearance of the work and a simple explanation of the scene of Judgment, to try to come to grips with the deeper levels of symbolic content. The dynamics of the rotating mass came to be viewed as being of iconographical significance in terms of an expression of inexorable fate, possibly related to the Medieval wheel of fortune. The idea of 'Fatum' in the fresco was examined by Dvorak and Venturi in the

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[75]E. Steinmann, *Die Sixtinische Kapelle*, vol. 2, Munich, 1905, cited by De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 59. H. Thode, *Michelangelo und das Ende der Renaissance*, reprinted, Leipzig: Fischer and Witting, 1962, vol. 3, p. 571

[76]A. Riegl, *Die Enstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, 1908, discussed by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 126.

[77]C. Justi, *Michelangelo*, Berlin, 1909. This and preceding references are quoted and discussed by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 126 and De Campos, *Michelangelo*, pp. 59–60.

expression of the inexorable Day of Judgment, which had begun with the response of Pope Paul III himself, mentioned above.

In 1938 Panofsky interpreted the Neoplatonic content of Michelangelo's works, but without relating this theme very specifically to an examination of the *Last Judgment* fresco. He took up the idea of the design of the *Last Judgment* as associated with the tradition of the Wheel of Fortune, and also recognized the cosmological dimension of the fresco by describing the non–perspectival space as 'gravitational, like a planetary system.'[79] About the same time, Blunt and Goldscheider[80] emphasized the circular composition, but primarily viewed the work within its sixteenth–century historical context, arguing that Michelangelo was here utilizing the human form, not 'for its own sake,' but in order to reflect the contemporary pessimistic situation in Rome after the Sack of the city in 1527 and during the period of the Counter Reformation.[81]

It was not until 1940 that De Tolnay consolidated tentative discussion of the circular format and the Apollo–Christ by presenting a very much deeper interpretation of the fresco, which he viewed as a religious heliocentric image of the macrocosmos.[82] De Tolnay's ideas have already been mentioned in the Introduction, chapter 1 above, but fuller examination of his theories is now necessary. Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, argued De Tolnay in his early paper, is a vision of the universe which was closely related to that of Copernicus, although seemingly

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[79]E. Panofsky, 'Michelangelo and Neoplatonism' in *Studies in Iconology*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972 ed., pp. 171–230, and in an unpublished lecture at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University 1938, referred to by Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 61.

[80]Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, chapter 5 on Michelangelo, especially pp. 65f. and 121–123; L. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo: Paintings, Sculpture, Architecture*, London: Phaidon, 1967, pp. 19–20.

[81]For the argued effect of the Sack of Rome on the artist and hence on the fresco, see De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, pp. 24–25; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 158; and A. Chastel, *Il Sacco di Roma*, Turin, 1983, cited by De Vecchi in Chastel et al. *Sistine Chapel*, p. 181. The fresco is perceived as symbolic representation of the catastrophic times – but this will be further discussed in chapter 10 below.

[82]C. de Tolnay, 'Le *Jugement Dernier* de Michel–Ange. Essai d'Interpretation', *Art Quarterly*, III, 1940, 124–146.

pre–dating those theories. De Tolnay implied[83] that Michelangelo could, independently, have reached the same astronomical conclusions as did the scientist. This seems highly improbable. Since De Tolnay felt obliged to question the likelihood of Copernicus as a source on the grounds of the late date of publication of his work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, he based his interpretation of the fresco's central motif of the Sun–Christ on ancient Pythagorean and astral myths.[84] These he related to the view of the fresco as dependent on a circular rotating movement around the central figure of the Apollo–Christ. In his discussion of the Sun–symbol of Christ in the fresco, De Tolnay did support the idea of Christ's depiction as the sun with some specifically Christian references to the theme of Christ as *Sol Invictus* or *Sol Iustitiae*. He briefly recognized, but did not really develop, the possibility of there being reference to the early Christian tradition of an equivalence between the Deity and the sun.[85] But De Tolnay viewed the Sun symbol as primarily pagan in origin and the analogy with Apollo is seen as directly corresponding with the pagan god. He cites the *Apollo Belvedere* in particular as a source for Christ's beardlessness.[86] This interpretation, proposed by De Tolnay, was largely accepted and supported by Feldhusen (1953), Ferdinandy (n. d. but 1950's) and Von Einem (1955).[87]

The 'cosmic' idea was also followed up by De Tolnay in his major work on Michelangelo in volume 5, which has already been quoted at some length in the introduction above.[88] After concluding that the chronology of Copernicus' writings in

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[83]*Ibid.*, p. 144.

[84]De Tolnay, *Jugement Dernier*, pp. 142–143. He relates Pythagorean myths to more primitive ideas concerning the sidereal movement of Uranus, the Ixion myth and Manicheism, claiming these as the source for the circular composition of the fresco.

[85]*Ibid.*, and n. 29 on p. 146.

[86]*Ibid.*, p. 142, 'Le Christ est ici le centre d'un système solaire; autour de lui gravitent toutes les constellations dans l'espace infini de l'univers. Ce n'est pas fortuitement que, jeune, imberbe,...il est si semblable à Apollon.'

[87]R. Feldhusen and M. de Ferdinandy in unpublished theses, quoted and discussed by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 120 and 127; Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, pp. 143–158, especially p. 145, where he refers to, 'Christ ... set in a circle,' 'Events of cosmic significance,' 'Christ like an Apollo,' etc.

[88]See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 49, 120–122, and above, chapter 1.

relation to Michelangelo's work on the fresco was incompatible as a source, De Tolnay did not pursue the specifically Copernican argument. As in his earlier paper, he developed an alternative, complex hypothesis for this symbolic depiction of Christ which in his interpretation was based upon ancient cosmological myths and legends. Quoting sources from Cicero and Lucretius, De Tolnay emphasized the relationship of the circular design of the fresco with the 'great revolving movement of the macrocosmos' and also stressed his view that the depiction of Christ as Apollo was based on these ancient pagan sources. 'This is no longer the Christ of the Gospels, but rather a divinity of Olympus,' he wrote, and Michelangelo 'casts the Christian content into the ancient form.'[89] De Tolnay linked these antique classical and Roman concepts with the Medieval Wheel of Fortune from which, he argued, was derived the revolving circularity of the fresco's composition. He also drew parallels between the ancient idea of 'Fatum' and the Medieval concept of 'Divine Justice.' Finally, he linked the overall composition of the fresco with the 'Tellurian and Uranian systems of astrology' but without giving full explanation or sources for these theories.[90]

Apart from De Tolnay's major emphasis on the Christ–Apollo theme, he also dwelt largely on the various literary and Biblical sources which Michelangelo might have used for the fresco. Biblical references given include Matthew 24, Daniel 7:13, John 3:14, Isaiah 13–69, Revelations 1:7, 8:2 and 20 1:12, Ezekiel 37 and I Thessalonians 4:16. He gives less importance to Dante, often argued as a source for the artist, and to the *Dies Irae* of Thomas a Celano which was used as a source for depictions of the Last Judgment in the Middle Ages.[91] In addition, De Tolnay's discussion here also considers the gesture, posture and facial features of Christ. In particular, he draws attention to the fact that close examination reveals Christ's

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[89]*Ibid.*, pp. 38 and 47.

[90]*Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

[91]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 33–34: 'Only the motifs of Charon and that of Minos seem to revert directly to Dante,' he says, and 'that there was no direct influence of the *Dies Irae* has recently been proved.' Compare with De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 64f., where Dante is included as a source.

facial expression as one not of anger but of impassivity. Tension, rather than real fear, thus seems to be expressed by many of the surrounding figures at the moment of Christ's judgment; it is the depiction of Man 'in relation to macrocosmic forces.' However, despite his full investigations of many aspects of the fresco, the idea of the cosmological overtones combined with the Sun–Christ theme had become De Tolnay's major line of interpretation of the *Last Judgment* fresco.

In De Tolnay's 1975 one–volume survey of his earlier publications the same cosmological theme was emphasized yet again, and an attempt made to draw the link with Copernicus:

> The artist has arrived by his own means at a vision of the universe which strangely anticipates that of his contemporary Copernicus. The idea of Michelangelo's composition precedes Copernicus' discovery by seven years.[92]

Although incorrect, as will be demonstrated, this reading of the chronology once more led him to reiterate his former argument concerning the more ancient cosmological sources for the fresco's design. De Tolnay thus went on to discuss the concept of the souls rejoining the cosmos after death as stars, which seemed to him to be portrayed in the fresco. This was an idea known to Dante as well as to Michelangelo, he argued, based on Plato's *Timaeus* and also linked to ancient ideas concerning the 'the great rotation of the macrocosm.' Echoing his former publication, he argued that the rotating movement of the fresco appeared to be related to the concept of the 'whirling of the universe' and the 'sidereal vortex of Uranus.' It is 'an idea depicted in primitive Bronze Age rock engravings' which concept also forms the basis of the 'Ixion myth'; as well as the Manichean symbol of the wheel and the Wheel of Fortune.[93] In attempting to trace sources for the use of the Sun–symbol, De Tolnay mentioned the ancient astral myths which he postulated as the basis for Michelangelo's depiction of Christ and he also again

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[92]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 1975, pp. 59–60.

[93]*Ibid.*, p. 60. Compare De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 47–49, and De Tolnay, *Jugement Dernier*, pp. 142–143. Nowhere does he give full explanation or sources for these influences which he proposes, nor how they might have been available to Michelangelo.

included antique references. De Tolnay thus favoured these rather obscure sources in preference to any other form of Sun–symbolism which might have had relevance in the mid–sixteenth century, and in preference to Copernicus' theory of heliocentricity which was dismissed on the grounds of chronology.

Apart from De Tolnay's study, De Campos' work on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is perhaps the most thorough analysis of the fresco and provides a contrasting approach. The study relates to his earlier work written jointly with Biagetti in Italian in 1944 and made available in revised form in English in 1978.[94] De Campos takes pains to discuss the traditional iconography of the scene as well as the documentation of Michelangelo's commission. He goes into detail concerning the actual painting of the fresco and also the symbolic content of the completed work. The literary and iconographic sources are discussed as well as the apparent variations from traditional iconography. De Campos observes three major zones in the work, one above the other, but he also perceives the circular format which is set in motion with a writhing mass of figures.[95] He summarily dismisses De Tolnay's theory of sun–centred iconography as improbable, but without questioning De Tolnay's dating of Copernicus' thesis in relation to the fresco. The circle he accounts for as being more probably influenced by the traditional concept of the Wheel of Fortune which fits in with the visual impact of the revolving fresco, ascending on Christ's dexter and descending on Christ's sinister.[96] An alternative explanation which De Campos proposes for the circle of figures around Christ concerns the 'mystical rose' of Medieval tradition, which also has sources in Dante.[97]

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[94]D. R. de Campos and B. Biagetti, *Il Giudizio Universale di Michelangelo*, Milan, 1944, cited in De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment, passim*, particularly chapters 1 and 3.

[95]De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 43 ('The entire fresco swirls around Christ's gesture'), and p. 75 where he emphasizes Christ's 'golden ring of light' and a 'vortex' around the Redeemer and another vortex further out.

[96]*Ibid.*, pp. 75–6 and n. 4 on p. 89. For the Wheel of Fortune, see also Réau, *Iconographie*, p. 639f., and E. Kitzinger, 'World map and Fortune's Wheel,' in *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1976, pp. 344–372, which demonstrates its cosmic overtones.

[97]*Ibid.*, p. 76. De Campos comments on Dante as a possible, but very limited source, p. 63.

The analogy between Christ and the sun, which seems to be visually suggested by the yellow mandorla (fig. 55) and which lies at the basis of De Tolnay's consideration of the heliocentric influence, is, however, acknowledged by De Campos, demonstrating the wide influence of this interpretation. De Campos mentions the Apollo–Christ idea, regarded as an example of pagan classicizing reminiscence in Michelangelo's work, but, like De Tolnay, he does not explore the Early Christian analogy between Christ and the sun.[98] While thus acknowledging classical influence in the fresco, De Campos' main emphasis lies on the religious spirit and content of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, which he considers as inter–linked with pre–Tridentine theological debate. This view of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as an expression of theological issues on the eve of the Council of Trent is an important theme to which further consideration will be given.[99]

The writings of De Tolnay and De Campos marked significant, deeper penetration and enquiry into the fresco's meaning and, until quite recently, have very much underwritten the standard approaches to the work. During the 1950's, several authors expressed their agreement with the ideas of De Tolnay, and references to the fresco's circular composition and cosmic qualities certainly increase from this time. Von Einem emphasized the 'cosmic drama' and the view of the 'Christ–Apollo' but he viewed the circle as stationary, a symbol of rest.[100] Saponaro (1955), Wilde (1950's lectures, published 1978), Allen (1953), and Morgan (1960) seem to follow an established trend and often refer to the Apollo–Christ and a circular formation with cosmic or celestial overtones.[101] Traditional features of the work have also been commented upon by modern art historians, and Wilde, as already mentioned, refers in particular, like Vasari and Condivi, to the fresco's

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[98]De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 77 and n. 4 on p. 89.

[99]De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 80f. The relationship of the fresco to contemporary theological debate will be dealt with in chapter 5.

[100]Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, pp. 147–154.

[101]M. Saponaro, *Michelangelo*, Milan: Mondadori, 1955, p. 203f.; Wilde, *Michelangelo, Six Lectures*, pp. 159–168; A. Allen, *The Story of Michelangelo*, London: Faber and Faber, 1953, p. 158; C. H. Morgan, *The Life of Michelangelo*, New York: Reynal, 1960, pp. 195 and 200.

division into horizontal and vertical zones. He detected a correspondence between horizontal layers and the cornices along the north and south walls, and he draws attention to the way the lowest level is emphasized over the altar. Wilde does concede, however, that these divisions are not strictly adhered to and that, while noticeable, they are subordinate to the overall circular basis of the design.[102] Building on Wilde's observations, it appears that the horizontal layers, less striking than the overall circular format, may be regarded as a concession to tradition, used to order the complex scene in a manner that would render its iconography recognizable and accessible, despite the innovative scheme that Michelangelo superimposed.

Writers in the 1950's tended in general to stress the pessimistic view of judgment as being one of the most evident aspects of the fresco, predominating over the more cheerful fate of the blessed which is, however, also represented.[103] These trends continued in the 1960's as writers like Carli (1963), Schott (1963), Bertram (1964), Hartt (1964), and Mariani (1964)[104] also seem to perceive the fate of the damned as being more accentuated than the drawing up of the blessed. The influence of De Tolnay's interpretation seems clear since the emphasis which he laid on the circular design and the Apollo Sun–Christ is often repeated, and mention of the cosmological dimension becomes increasingly common after his major publication in 1960.[105] Amongst these authors, however, cosmic allusions and references still continue to be very vague and even less well supported by source material than De Tolnay's original exposition. It seems that, influenced by De Tolnay, references to a cosmological basis for the fresco became very common in the literature, but without the specific relationship between the work and contemporary

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[102]Wilde, *Six Lectures*, p. 166. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo*, p. 20 comments on these levels but he also refers to 'inner' and 'outer' circles.

[103]For example, Allen, *Story of Michelangelo*, pp. 158–159; Morgan, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 195f.

[104]Carli, *All the Paintings*, p. 33; R. Schott, *Michelangelo*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1963, pp. 172–192, 248; A. Bertram, *Michelangelo*, New York: Dutton, 1964, p. 115f; Hartt, *Michelangelo*, p. 50f.; V. Mariani, *Michelangelo the Painter*, New York: Abrams, 1964, p. 100f. Mariani discusses De Tolnay's ideas on p. 119.

[105]As in Schott, *Michelangelo*, p. 183 ('the infinity of the metacosmos opens out'); Bertram, *Michelangelo*, p. 115; Hartt, *Michelangelo*, pp. 50–51.

cosmology having been properly investigated.

In spite of this wide assimilation of De Tolnay's ideas, his interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* has also received some adverse criticism. As has already been mentioned in the introduction, chapter 1 above, more than any other writer, Salvini has attempted to assess De Tolnay's heliocentric and cosmological interpretation of the fresco. Salvini dismissed De Tolnay's hypothesis on at least two occasions as being far too complicated in relation to what we know of the artist and his way of thinking.[106] The idea, he says, is 'hardly convincing' and anyway 'entirely superfluous' (1965). The complex mythological foundations which De Tolnay argues as the basis for the theme are out of place according to Salvini, although he still does follow the usual pattern of references to the Christ–Apollo and the fresco as of 'cosmic' and 'circular' design.[107] In 1978, to these arguments against De Tolnay's hypothesis, Salvini added a short discussion of potential alternative sources in Dante, Neoplatonism and the Catholic or Protestant Reformation.[108]

Salvini thus regarded De Tolnay's hypothesis of a connection between the fresco and heliocentric theory as rather improbable, and this has also been the case on the rare occasions when the concept has been considered in scientific publications. For example, in the special publication commemorating the five–hundredth anniversary of Copernicus' birth, the idea the Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco could be related to Copernican ideas did receive some comment, but the possibility was regarded as extremely unlikely – without any reasons being proposed for this conclusion.[109]

For the remainder of the 1960's and early 1970's, the majority of

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[106]Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, pp. 131–140, and R. Salvini, 'Michelangelo the Painter,' in Salmi, *Complete Works*, pp. 223f and 234.

[107]See Salvini. 'Michelangelo the Painter', pp. 240–241 where, he refers to Christ as 'Apollonian' and to the fresco's 'cosmic force'; and Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 123, 'cosmic scale,' and p. 135 'Apollonian Christ.'

[108]Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 137f.

[109]B. Bienkowska, (ed.) *The Scientific World of Copernicus*, Dordrecht: Reidel, p. 104: 'The interpretations which say that the great fresco is a pictorial vision of heliocentrism might go a bit far.'

interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* have moved in a rather set pattern, especially with the increase of more popular literature aimed at reaching a wider and less scholarly readership. As an example, Coughland (1966) views Michelangelo's fresco as pessimistic, the result of the impact of historical events, namely the Sack of Rome.[110] He is evidently influenced by De Tolnay in his description of Christ as 'a great sun around which the whole action whirls' but goes no further in this discussion.

Freedberg (1979) examined the antique concept of Apollo and referred to 'the cosmic simile' and 'Christ seated in the Heavens like a sun,'[111] while more formal interpretation, for example, that by Beck (1981), considered the stylistic approach in the fresco, especially with regard to mannerist aspects.[112] Camesasca (and Ettlinger in the introduction to the same book, 1969) both return to the old idea of the fresco as the 'compendium of the attitudes of the human body' but stress the way this is used to express the range of emotion of the participants of the drama. Camesasca refers to 'circles,' 'cosmic terror' and 'abstract infinity,' and he also goes into detail concerning the possible identification of the figures with Biblical or contemporary sixteenth–century characters.[113] Hibbard (1975) considers the theme of the *Sol Iustitiae*,[114] which is also mentioned by Furse (1975).[115] In general, art historians of this period refer to the traditional views of pessimism and the depiction of the human body in the fresco, but several among them, Camesasca, Beck and Hibbard, also

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[110]R. Coughland, *The World of Michelangelo*, New York: Time–Life, 1960, p. 127.

[111]S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*, New York: Penguin, 1979, pp. 469–473.

[112]J. Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, New York: Harper and Row, 1981, p. 341f: commenting on the overall composition, he says, '...the geometry is only approximate.' Observations on the mannerist stylistic qualities in the work (for which see E. Rankin, 'Laying a myth: Notes on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' *De Arte*, 24, 1980, pp. 18–19) do not concern us here.

[113]Camesasca, *Michelangelo, Complete Paintings*, with an introduction by L. D. Ettlinger, pp. 5–7 and 102–104.

[114]H. Hibbard, *Michelangelo. Painter, Sculptor, Architect*, London: Allen Lane, 1975, p. 246. Hibbard describes 'a cosmic simile, with Christ like the sun' and goes on to discuss the transformation of the ancient *Sol Invictus* into the Christian *Sol Iustitiae*, based on De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 47.

[115]J. Furse, *Michelangelo and his Art*, London: Hamlyn, 1975, p. 82.

stress the cosmic overtones or the centrality of the figure of Christ within a circular format.[116]

During the post–war period, the cosmic qualities of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, together with its evident circular design around the Christ–Apollo (shown by formal analysis), thus continue to receive attention on a previously unknown scale. This appears to be largely attributable to De Tolnay's writings on the subject, which had been widely disseminated on a superficial level but scarcely explored in depth. Biblical and literary references retain the traditional emphasis, and analysis of the painting itself tends to be rather formal and stylistic, or simply the straightforward reiteration of previous theory to which nothing new is added – stressing either the compendium of nude anatomy, the range of emotion depicted, or the dynamism of the dramatic composition. The idea of the fresco as an expression of Michelangelo's own personal feelings gains predominance from the 1950's, which is also reflected in works by Clements and Summers.[117] Since that time, a more objective approach through the historical data or the documentary evidence of the commission has also been stressed by writers like Ramsden (1963)[118] and Murray (1980 and 1984).[119]

v) The Current State of Research

Since the major interpretations by De Tolnay and De Campos in the 1940's, it is only in the 1970's that fresh attempts have been made to penetrate and interpret the deeper meaning of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, beyond its physical appearance. Most important of these, perhaps, is that of Steinberg who, drawing on

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[116]Camesasca, *Michelangelo*, p. 102; Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, pp. 341–342; Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, pp. 242–245.

[117]See R. J. Clements, *Michelangelo's Theory of Art*, New York: Gramercy, 1961; *idem*, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, London: Peter Owen, 1966. D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, is especially important for Michelangelo's intellectual background, pp. 9 and 243.

[118]Ramsden, *Letters of Michelangelo*, vol. 2, nos. 199, 202, 209, 210 (letters concerning the *Last Judgment*).

[119]L. Murray, *Michelangelo*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1980, p. 139, and Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, pp. 154–167 and 183.

De Tolnay's observation that Christ's facial expression is not actually angry, develops the theory that the fresco's message is totally optimistic rather than pessimistic. He argues that Christ's judgment has not yet taken place at the moment depicted, and suggests that the judgment is to be less harsh and in fact less permanent than previously supposed. These ideas, as Steinberg points out, would link up with certain heretical ideas then current in Italy. In this way he argues Michelangelo's inclination towards heretical Protestant–type ideas and their expression in the fresco, behind, as it were, 'the very throne of the Pope.'[120] Steinberg mentions De Tolnay's view of the Apollo–Christ as related to Copernican theory only in passing and seemingly as further evidence of Michelangelo's affinity with Protestant and heretical ideas.[121] This interpretation completely disregards the actual reactions of contemporary Catholics and Protestants to Copernicus' theory, which will form a major part of chapter 8 below.

Five years later, in 1980, Steinberg developed further theoretical views of the fresco in two papers concerning what he terms 'The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment.*'[122] This argument of Steinberg is based on a formal analysis of the painting which is dependent upon the existence of strong compositional diagonals (compare with fig. 53). As pointed out above in section iii, diagonal emphasis had been detected in the composition of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* by Wölfflin in 1898, and Steinberg appears to be returning to this tradition, but he accords it symbolic significance, relating it to concepts of Fatum (his 'Line of Fate').[123] Steinberg's perception of one of the diagonals in the composition as ending up in the

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[120]Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 49.

[121]*Ibid.*, 'Christ is situated, sunlike, Copernican...', he writes, which, in this context, infers that Copernicus' theory was unacceptable to the Roman Church at this time. De Tolnay had also referred to 'the heliocentrism which was rejected by the official theology of the sixteenth century' (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 122).

[122]L. Steinberg, 'A Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' *Daedalus*, 109, 1980, pp. 207–273, and L. Steinberg, 'The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting,' in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *The Language of Images*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 85–128. He still refers to the fresco as 'cosmic' (p. 109).

[123]Steinberg, 'A Corner of the *Last Judgment*', p. 237f., and Steinberg, 'Line of Fate' p. 105f. He comments in particular on a diagonal which he sees as extending from the Crown of Thorns to the genitalia of Minos, and also here develops his discussion of the significance of Michelangelo's self–portrait in the 'flayed skin.'

vicinity of Christ's right thigh is a theme which will be taken up again in the course of this study, although Steinberg himself finds no apparent significance in the emphasis of the thigh. 'Whoever', he asks rhetorically, 'heard of thighs as conveyors of grace?', and he overlooks any possible significance here.[124]

Steinberg's rather controversial interpretations of Michelangelo's work and the *Last Judgment* in particular are very important because they have provoked considerable reaction and discussion.[125] The idea of the *Last Judgment* fresco as heretical appears unconvincing not only because Michelangelo's deliberate flouting of Papal authority is unlikely, but particularly because Pope Paul III almost immediately followed up with further commissions in the Pauline Chapel.[126] It is also unlikely that Michelangelo was so unable to express himself that the fresco has been read incorrectly for over four hundred years: no contemporary or later commentary reveals an understanding of the type of heretical 'messages' which according to Steinberg are expressed in the work.

At about the same time as Steinberg's writings, in 1976, Hall also examined the question of the theological content of the fresco.[127] She recognizes the cosmological dimension in very general terms since, she says (without any qualifying explanation), 'the event takes place in space–time': she also refers to 'the beardless

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[124]See Steinberg, 'Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' plates 7 and 9. Steinberg appears to have seriously underestimated the theological symbolic significance of the thigh, as will be discussed in chapter 9, below.

[125]For example, his interpretation of the *Last Judgment* is discussed by M. Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Resurrection of the Body and Predestination,' *Art Bulletin*, 58, March 1976, pp. 85–92, and F. Hartt, *Italian Renaissance Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, revised ed. 1987, p. 642. Other controversial works on Michelangelo by Steinberg include 'Michelangelo's Florentine *Pietà*: The Missing Leg,' *Art Bulletin*, 50 (1) March 1968, pp. 343–359; *Michelangelo's Last Paintings*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1975; 'Michelangelo's Florentine *Pietà*: The Missing Leg Twenty Years After,' *Art Bulletin*, 71 (3) Sept. 1989, pp. 480–505.

[126]Paul III instigated the commission for the Pauline Chapel frescoes in mid November, 1541: he appointed a special salaried superintendent for the preservation of the Sistine and Pauline frescoes in October 1543, recognizing already the difficulties of dust and smoke damage from candles. The post was retained by successive Popes, even Pope Paul IV Carafa, continuously until 1737 (Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, pp. 615 and 631; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 99).

[127]Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*' pp. 85–92. Compare De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 19–20 and 99–100.

Apollonian Christ.' But her main line of interpretation is based on the problematic reference, in March 1534, of Agnello (the Venetian envoy) to the painting as a *resurrectione* and the question of a possible change of theme in the early days of the commission. Hall argues that the 'resurrection' mentioned by Agnello in fact meant the fresco as we know it and did not refer to an earlier project. The major theme of the *Last Judgment*, according to Hall, refers to current theological debate on the Catholic doctrine of Resurrection of the Body after the moment of Judgment. Agnello's reference to the fresco as a 'resurrection' would thus imply, she says, that he must have been aware of the detailed thought of the Curia concerning this doctrine at the time. This seems unlikely.[128] Hall also relates this argument to her proposal of I Corinthians 15, with its emphasis on Resurrection, as the main basis for the fresco. This is an important scriptural source for the *Last Judgment* which has received little attention and was not mentioned by De Tolnay or De Campos in their otherwise definitive lists of Scriptural sources. Hall stresses the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body as a contrast to the Renaissance Neoplatonic emphasis on the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul and she presents evidence for the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body as gaining in importance during the sixteenth-century religious controversies. This, she says, explains Michelangelo's emphasis in the painting on the solidity of the human form.[129]

Hall's interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* does not seem to be totally convincing since her evidence for the predominance of the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Flesh over the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul at the time of the commission is not really fully explored. Further, the argument seems unconvincing in terms of Michelangelo's known adherence to the ideas of the Viterbo group and the *Spirituali*[130] who laid great stress on the idea of the spiritual

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[128]Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' p. 92.

[129]*Ibid.*, p. 88. The reference to 'the most emphatically corporeal figures he had ever created' appears to discount the flayed skin.

[130]For information on the *Spirituali* and Michelangelo's affinity with that group, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, chapter 3, pp. 51–69. The theological background will be fully discussed in chapter 5.

rather than the fleshly aspect of man's existence. Besides, there seems little reason why the two doctrines (Catholic Resurrection of the Body and Neoplatonic Immortality of the Soul) should be regarded as mutually exclusive. The writings of the Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino on the Immortality of the Soul were highly influential on the formation of Catholic doctrinal decisions at the Fifth Lateran Council in 1514, when this doctrine was incorporated into Catholic dogma.[131] In addition, Ficino himself also recognized the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, as did many other Neoplatonists. It is not necessary to distinguish exclusively between *either* Neoplatonic *or* Catholic doctrines in Michelangelo's fresco. The two themes could well have been combined in his work for it was, after all, the avowed intention of the Renaissance Neoplatonists to incorporate ancient Platonic thought within the framework of the Catholic faith.[132] It is also difficult to accept Hall's conclusion that the interpretations of Condivi and Vasari were incorrect, whilst Agnello's letter represented 'a leak from a highly placed source privy to the discussion being held on the interpretation the subject was to be given.'[133]

De Maio (1978) gives a penetrating interpretation of Michelangelo's thought in relation to the contemporary religious reforming atmosphere in Italy. He examines the fresco of the *Last Judgment* in the theological context of the Counter–Reformation, and his work is particularly useful for documentation of the early opposition to the fresco.[134] Other recent studies include that of Liebert (1983)[135]

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[131]For Ficino (1433–1499) see P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, (trans. V. Conant) New York: Columbia University Press, 1943.

[132]Discussion of Platonic themes will follow in chapter 7. Attempts to distinguish and separate Neoplatonic and Christian influences in Michelangelo's work are common (for example, Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 312), but the concept that Michelangelo's early period was characterised by pagan Neoplatonism, which then gave way to intense Christian anti–platonic themes in his later period, is one which will be discussed further in the course of this thesis, especially chapter 10.

[133]Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*', p. 92. It seems unlikely that the Venetian envoy would be in possession of such subtle inside information.

[134]De Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

[135]R. Liebert, *Michelangelo, A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Work*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, especially chapter 18. Liebert's theories have been sharply criticised by E. H. Ramsden, 'Michelangelo and the Psychoanalysts,' *Apollo*, 120 (272) Oct. 1984, p. 290, and L. Steinberg, 'Shrinking Michelangelo,' *New York Review of Books*, 28th June 1984, pp. 41–45.

who takes a psychoanalytic standpoint for his discussions of Michelangelo's various works. This psychoanalytic approach does follow the trend of interpretation of the 'hidden meaning' in the fresco, rather than simply a formal, stylistic or straightforward art–historical approach, but the Freudian and sexually orientated standpoint appears to be too exaggerated and the arguments put forward implausible.[136] Liebert does comment at some length on Michelangelo's interest in the Apollo theme, but he also states, for example, that the central group (of Christ, the Virgin Mary and St Bartholomew) is to be read in terms of Michelangelo's matricidal, patricidal and homosexual tendencies.[137] Similar material is offered by Leites who also appears to read a great deal of twentieth–century Freudian significance into the sixteenth–century artist's motives.[138]

Amongst the most recent studies concerning Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Dixon has concentrated on discussion of whether the overall theme is one of condemnation or redemption; he too refers to the Copernican idea but without discussion in depth.[139] Barnes' thesis (1986) is largely concerned with the patronage of the fresco, but does also devote some discussion to other problems such as Christ's gesture, the role of Hell, the use of Dante as a source and the idea of pessimism after the Sack of Rome. De Tolnay's cosmological interpretation is also considered and its foundation on 'Phythagorean' [sic] sources. The idea of the Christ–Apollo and the

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[136]See also J. D. Oremland, *Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling*, Madison: International University Press, 1989, who writes on the religious iconography, 'The Jesus myth contains a basic emphasis on preoedipal attachment to an autoinseminated mother that is crucial to understanding Michelangelo's creativity,' (p. 115). Ramsden, ('Michelangelo and the Psychoanalysts,' p. 290), Murray (*Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 155) and Hartt (*Michelangelo*, p. 16) are among those who criticize this approach to the interpretation of deeper meaning in Michelangelo's work which is based on 'the regrettable controversy over Michelangelo's sex life.'

[137]Liebert, *Psychonanalytic Study*, chapter 18.

[138]N. Leites, *Art and Life, Aspects of Michelangelo*, New York: New York University Press, 1986. Similarly R. and E. Sterba, 'The Personality of Michelangelo Buonarroti. Some reflections,' *American Imago*, 1978, 35, pp. 156–177, and R. Goffen, 'Renaissance Dreams,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40, 1987, pp. 682–706.

[139]J. W. Dixon, 'Michelangelo's Last Judgement: Drama of Judgement or Drama of Redemption?' *Studies in Iconography*, 9, 1983, pp. 67–82, and Dixon, 'Christology,' pp. 514–527. He discusses the Apollo–Christ and the 'cosmic' qualities, but is one of the few to question the circularity of the composition.

Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel, namely Lamarche–Vadel (1986)[87] and Chastel et al. (1986)[88] show that the discussion surrounding the fresco, its meaning and the sources used by Michelangelo, continues to stimulate a great deal of interest. Lamarche–Vadel follows the usual references to the circular design of the fresco around the Sun–Christ, while the essay by De Vecchi, in the commemorative volume with essays by Chastel and others, draws attention to the way in which Michelangelo's cosmic depiction of the *Last Judgment* overturns the traditional arrangement of the scene based on the Christian hierarchical view of the universe, but without presenting any explanation for this. The fresco is also examined in relation to the Chapel as a whole and with due consideration for the current cleaning and restorations. Finally, a paper by Greenstein (1989), accepting and acknowledging the possibility of multi–layered meaning in the fresco, presents an argument for a reading of the inner circle of figures as bearing reference to the Transfiguration as a prefiguring of the Last Judgment.[89]

Ranging from the conventional to the controversial, various interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* have been put forward and the fresco, situated physically at the very centre of Christendom and symbolically at the core of the Christian religion, has provoked much debate. But amongst all this discussion, the idea of examining the work in the context of the traditional cosmological framework of the scene's iconography has received little detailed attention, and present evidence suggests that further investigation is required into the interlinked themes of cosmology and Sun–symbolism in the fresco. De Tolnay's cosmological interpretation of Christ as a Sun–symbol in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* does

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[87]D. Lamarche–Vadel, *Michelangelo*, Paris: Nouvelles Editions Françaises, 1986, (Eng. trans. New Jersey: Chartwell, 1986), p. 136f., where he refers to 'concentric circles' and briefly also to heliocentricity.

[88]Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel: Michelangelo Rediscovered*, includes various relevant articles by different authors on the chapel in general, the ceiling frescoes, the *Last Judgment*, and the recent restorations.

[89]J. M. Greenstein, ' "How Glorious the Second Coming of Christ": Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and the Transfiguration,' *Artibus et Historiae*, (20) 1989, pp. 33–57.

evidence suggests that further investigation is required into the interlinked themes of cosmology and Sun–symbolism in the fresco. De Tolnay's cosmological interpretation of Christ as a Sun–symbol in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* does appear to have had some validity and influence in general terms, but it was weakened by his references to the impossibility of Michelangelo having known of heliocentric cosmology. Hence the idea was never fully and seriously explored, leading to vagueness and confusion in the succeeding literature. It will be argued here, that the fresco should properly be considered as a Christian heliocentric vision of Christ depicted as the sun and centre of the universe. This approach is not to be founded upon the obscure ancient astral myths proposed by De Tolnay. A more pure and simple foundation can be traced for the Sun–symbolism in the fresco, which fits in far more appropriately with what we know of the artist and his time. In this argument it is proposed that, just as in the traditional iconography of the *Last Judgment*, Michelangelo's ordering of the complex scene and Christ's role was achieved by relating it in broad terms to the contemporary view of the cosmos – but it was the current cosmological framework which had changed. And, in addition, in Michelangelo's case this framework was also related to and dependent upon the common ground shared between other areas of contemporary thought and interest – the Catholic Reformation revival of the traditional Christian analogy between the Deity and the sun, the Neoplatonic cult of Sun–symbolism, literary sources in Dante, and the actual scientific theory of heliocentricity as outlined by Copernicus. A new Biblical source for the fresco will also be proposed which, taken in conjunction with a formal and analytic approach to the actual construction of the fresco on the wall surface, will lend weight to the central theme of this hypothesis.

Chapter 5

Religious Sources

> I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life.
>
> John 8:12.

i) Christian light symbolism

Biblical mysteries were from the beginning explained by metaphors of light. From the very first chapter of the Old Testament, attention was drawn to the significance of light in a symbolic manner, for, on the first day of the Creation, God said 'Let there be light and there was light, and God saw the light that it was good' (Genesis 1:3–4). In the earliest books of the Old Testament, the analogy with light was thus used to explain the meaning of God and His creation.[1] Light is a scriptural symbol for all that is good and true – for the knowledge of God Himself.[2] Following on from this, in the New Testament the metaphor is expanded to include a direct analogy with Christ, who is presented as the Light of the World. This concept is greatly emphasized, particularly in the Gospel of St John, the so–called 'Gospel of Light.'[3] Throughout this book of the New Testament, light is continuously given strong allegorical meaning, – for example, in John 1:4–9; 3:19; 8:12 (quoted above); 9:5 and 12:35, 36, 46. In chapter 3, as part of Christ's teaching to Nicodemus, the

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[1]Examples are numerous, e.g. Psalms 27:1 ('the Lord is my light and my salvation'); 118:27 ('God is the Lord, who hath shown us light'); Isaiah 60:19 ('the Lord shall be to thee an everlasting light').

[2]This concept is also extremely commonplace in Christian exegesis. For comment on light symbolism in Christian iconography, see, for example, G. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 43, 148f and U. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, chapter 4, 'The Aesthetics of Light.'

[3]See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: University Press, 1972 (1st ed. 1953), especially part 2, chapter 1 'Symbolism' and chapter 7, 'Light, Glory, Judgment.' Dodd places an emphasis on the Platonic influences in John's Gospel, especially with respect to the use of light symbolism (as in Plato's metaphors of the sun and cave, p. 133). Also R. H. Lightfoot, *St John's Gospel. A Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963 (1st ed. 1956), especially pp. 189–203, 'The Lord as the light of the World.'

discussion moves swiftly from the use of light metaphor to judgment (v. 19), and again at 8:12–16 and 12:46–47, where Christ states: 'I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness ... for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.' (compare 3:17 and 8:15). As Dodd points out, in linking the light metaphor with the judgment of man, St John emphasizes the saving nature of the Second Coming as much as the purely negative and destructive Apocalyptic interpretation of Judgment.[4] In turn, stemming from the scriptural identity between Christ and light, comes the direct analogy between Christ and the sun itself.

The astronomical feature of the sun was the object of reverence, worship and adoration to a major proportion of the early populations of this earth.[5] The view of the sun as Deity – being the source of light and warmth, and hence of human, animal and plant life – is one of the most ancient manifestations of religious sensitivity. The concept of Sun–worship has existed since earliest recorded times. Apparently originating in the orient,[6] the concept of paying reverence and obeisance to the sun spread to the Mediterranean basin and proliferated across Europe. In these areas, Sumerians, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans were all involved, to varying degrees, with the worship of the sun.[7] In many instances, the personification of the sun as a specific deity was maintained. In

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[4]The concept of Christ as 'the true light ... which lighteth every man' (1:4) is emphasized from the beginning of this Gospel. Dodd demonstrates how the symbol of light was used here to give a cosmological account 'of the relation of the absolute to phenomena, of God to the universe,' since 'Light communicates itself by radiations which are emanations of its own substance' (Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, p. 202). For links between light symbolism and judgment, see *ibid.*, pp. 208–212.

[5]J. G. Frazer, *The Worship of Nature*, London: Macmillan, 1926, chapters 12–16, pp. 441–668; A. Whittick, *Symbols, Signs and their Meaning*, London, 1960, pp. 266–267; J. B. Hannay, *Symbolism in Relation to Religion; Christianity, the Sources of its Teaching and Symbolism*, Washington: Kennikat, 1971, part 1, chapter 4; also H. R. Engler, *Die Sonne als Symbol*, Zurich: Helian[illegible]us Verlag, 1962, especially section 4, 'Christus, das Licht der Welt, als Symbol der [illegible]nne,' pp. 237–286.

[6]Frazer, *Worship of Nature*, pp. 441–528; Hannay, *Symbolism*, p. 260f.

[7]Frazer, *Worship of Nature*, pp. 441–528; J. Goodwin and A. Doster (eds.), *Fire of Life. The Smithsonian Book of the Sun*, New York: Norton, 1981; *Encyclopaedia of World Art*, 'Astronomy' (vol 2, columns 42–84) and 'Cosmology' (vol. 3, cols. 835–864). Note De Tolnay's comment on primitive Sun–symbols in rock paintings (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 48).

the Mediterranean basin, the cult reached its height of when it became centred on the Graeco–Roman Sun–god Apollo, whose popularity was immense. Son of Zeus and Leto, and equated with Helios the Sun–god, Apollo was a symbol of light and representative of the sun to both Greeks and Romans.[8] A powerful figure, he could act as a vengeful destroyer but was also protective against evil, in the same way, perhaps, as the sun itself. His links with Asclepius the god of healing make him a suitable candidate eventually to bear comparison with the Christian Deity; his strength and youthful appearance also seem appropriate in the analogy between the ancient form of the Sun–Deity and the Christian Son of God. Thus the eventual synthesis of pagan and Christian in the adaptation of visual forms of the Sun–god for the Christian Deity seemed appropriate.[9]

In looking afresh at Michelangelo's possible sources for Sun–symbolism, such ancient tradition appears relevant, not in all its varied forms, but only inasmuch as these basic ideas were eventually to become incorporated into Christian dogma. The analogy between the pagan Sun–god and Christ Himself appears to be related to the scriptural tendency to identify the coming Messiah with the sun,[10] a tradition which predates many of the later sun–worshipping cults such as the Roman or Mithraic. The specific identity between the sun and the Deity of the Judaeo–Christian religion is already emphasized in the Old Testament. The Psalms are noted for their light symbolism in general, as at 27:1 ('The Lord is my light and my salvation'); 36:9; 37:6; 43:3; 97:11; 118:27 ('God is the Lord who has shown us light'); and 119:105. Specific metaphorical references to the sun itself are also to be found, for example, Psalms 74:16 ('thou hast prepared the light and the sun'), and, an even more specific comparison, 84:11 ('For the Lord God is a sun and a shield'). These

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[8]For details of the myth, see R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, (2 vols.) Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, vol. 1, pp. 76–82.

[9]*Ibid*, p. 173f. Comparison between Christ and the Sun–god is presented in table form by Hannay, *Symbolism*, p. 314. See Frazer, pp. 519f and 526–528, for the adaptation of Sun–symbolism to Christianity. The visual analogy will be discussed further below.

[10]As especially in Malachi 4:2, see below. This symbolism evidently has astronomical and cosmological overtones which are connected with the concept of the rising sun. See also Hautecoeur, *Mystique et Architecture*, 'Le Christ Solaire,' p.

serve as very positive evidence of the comparison which is made with the Deity.

The direct analogy between the Messiah and the astronomical feature of the sun in the Old Testament is founded on the Biblical reference in Malachi 4:2, where the coming of the Messiah on the Day of Judgment (significantly corresponding to Michelangelo's fresco) is described: 'But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.'[11] This comparison between the Messiah and the sun itself is carried over into the New Testament, as St. Matthew describes Christ at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) when His face 'did shine as the sun.' Throughout the gospels of the New Testament, references to Christ as the sun, the bringer or giver of light (meaning well–being or knowledge of God) are numerous. The gospel of St John, which has recently been argued as of especial interest for Michelangelo,[12] contains perhaps the most instances of the use of the light metaphor,[13] but references are also to be found in Acts (9:3, 26:23), II Corinthians (4:6) and II Timothy (1:10). The more precise comparison between Christ and the sun is used on several occasions in the Revelation of St John the Divine, where the idea of Christ as the sun at the time of the vision of the Day of Judgment is continued. The emphasis of the Sun–analogy here seems highly significant for Michelangelo's portrayal of Christ.[14] In Revelations 1:16, the 'Judge'

177f.

[11]The Christian reading, of course, would take this to mean Christ (confusion or similarity between the words 'sun' and 'son' occurs by chance in the English language). De Tolnay commented on the idea of Michelangelo's Christ as related to the Christian identification of Christ and the Sun, and also to this concept of Christ as the Sun of Righteousness (*sol iustitiae*) or Unconquered Sun (*sol invictus*), (De Tolnay, 'Jugement Dernier' p. 142; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 47), but it is not really considered in depth. As previously mentioned, he seems to perceive the Christ–Apollo as a pagan form.

[12]St John's gospel is a major source for the reform movement of Nicodemism in which Michelangelo's involvement has been argued. See V. Shrimplin–Evangelidis, 'Michelangelo and Nicodemism: the Florentine *Pietà*,' *Art Bulletin*, 71 (1) March 1989, pp. 58–66, especially p. 60.

[13]For references to light symbolism in the Gospel of St John, see beginning of this chapter above. Light symbolism in John has been related to its Neoplatonic content, see Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, chapters 1–3 and *passim*; Lightfoot, *St John's Gospel*, pp. 49–56, 'The Greek Background.'

[14]G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine*, London: Black, 1984. Caird discusses the question of whether the author of *Revelations* was the same as the author of St John's gospel (pp. 3–6). The 'mighty angel' linked with

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is described: 'and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength,' which may be viewed as corresponding with Michelangelo's view of Christ in the fresco. This may be compared with Revelations 10:1 ('and his face was as it were the sun') and 21:23 ('the city had no need of the sun...the Lamb is the light thereof'). Like the Old Testament reference in Malachi 4:2, mentioned above, this concept of Christ *as Judge* being depicted as the sun at the very moment of Judgment appears to relate directly to Michelangelo's interpretation of the figure.

Christianity evidently took account of the ancient solar mysticism and beliefs of the various peoples it aimed to convert. As already mentioned, many aspects of Christian tradition were related to former pagan custom and the appropriateness of the analogy between Christ and the Sun–god has already been discussed, but there also exist broader cosmological implications. For example, the adoption of the pagan festival of the winter solstice for the celebration of Christ's birth seemed appropriate in the absence of scriptural evidence for the precise date. It seemed apt for the Saviour to be born at this time when the sun begins to gain in ascendancy, to bring new life to the 'dead' world.[15] The Catholic Liturgical texts for Advent and Christmas amply reflect this continuing tradition: at vespers of the eve of this 'Sun' day there is sung, 'When Heaven's sun has arisen, ye shall see the King of Kings coming forth,'[16] and light symbolism is strongly emphasized in the masses for midnight, dawn and Christmas day: 'This day shall a light shine on us.'[17]

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the sun in the book of Revelations is identified with Christ (pp. 125–126).

[15]This was commonly accepted from the fourth century and commented on by the Church Fathers such as St Ambrose, St Augustine, St John Chrysostom, St Clement of Alexandria, St Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo–Dionysius the Areopagite. The religious symbolism of the sun continued even into the later Medieval period, as for example in St Francis of Assisi's famous 'Hymn to the Sun,' where he says 'O Lord, he signifies to us Thee.' See H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, London: Burns and Oates, 1963, chapter 4, 'The Christian Mystery of Sun and Moon,' especially 129f, 'The Christmas Sun,' and P. Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year*, Dublin: Dufy, 1886, vol. 2 'Christmas,' especially chapters 1 and 2, 'The History of Christmas' and 'The Mystery of Christmas.'

[16]Quoted by Rahner, *ibid.*, p. 154.

[17]See *The Roman Missal. Being the text of the Missale Romanum*, (ed. J. O'Connell and H. P. R. Finberg), London: Burn Oates and Washbourne, 1950. This gives the Mass 'in its most ancient form,' p. xxiii. For the Christmas Liturgy, see especially pp. 31, 34 ('Lux fulgebit hodie super nos'), 36, 39, etc. The theme that the coming of Christ at Christmastime prefigures the Coming at the *Last Judgment* is also

Similarly, the concept of 'resurrection' appears appropriate to the time of the spring equinox (Easter).[18] This relationship was linked, in turn, to the actual days of the week and the choice of the Sun's day for the Sabbath, since Christ was crucified and the sun darkened on the day before Saturn's day (Saturday) and appeared resurrected on that day dedicated to Helios (Sunday). The Christian emphasis on the day of Helios caused the early Christians to be regarded as a species of sun–worshippers.[19] In sum, as Rahner writes, 'to this allegorical way of thinking, the whole life of Jesus, right up to His death and resurrection, is one great Sun mystery.'[20]

The type of associations between Sun–worship and early Christianity which have been considered are of special significance for the present discussion because of a direct relevance for the design of St Peter's in Rome. Special interest in the Sun–symbol as a means for the transition from paganism to Christianity was shown by the Emperor Constantine, responsible for making Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 313 (Edict of Milan). Constantine's great interest in Sun–worship has been documented,[21] and it is even given as the reason for the reverse orientation of the first Basilica of St Peter's and hence the Renaissance Church and the Sistine Chapel itself (fig. 71). Lees–Milne shows how Constantine's remaining concern for Sun–worship caused him to have the Basilica built so that the rays of the rising sun could be viewed from the entrance of the Basilica, and would fall on the celebrant at the High Altar during the Mass.[22] This orientation was retained during the

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expressed in the Christmas Liturgy (*ibid.*, pp. 28, 31). It is interesting that Vasari (*Lives*, ed. Bull, p. 383) believed that the *Last Judgment* was 'unveiled' on Christmas Day, 1541 (see above, chapter 4).

[18]Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, pp. 103–129, 'The Easter Sun.' According to Rahner, such symbolic concepts are related to, if not founded on, the solar mysticism of Platonic philosophy, especially Plotinus (c. 205–270), *ibid.*, pp. 89–93, 99.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 105f.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 136f.

[21]P. Pierce, 'The Arch of Constantine. Propaganda and Ideology in Late Roman Art,' *Art History*, 12 (4) Dec. 1989, pp. 387–418, especially 407f. Pierce discusses Constantine's interest in Sun–worship and the inclusion of sun–motifs on the Arch of Constantine, which were naturally available to Michelangelo.

[22]Lees–Milne, *St Peter's*, chapter 3 'Constantine's basilica,' especially p. 77.

Renaissance rebuilding and the Sistine chapel was naturally orientated the same way, so the unusual western altar wall, where Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* was to be painted, was in fact historically related to a Sun–Deity analogy.

It is important to remember that the emphasis on the Early Christian analogy between Christ and the sun continued into the Medieval and Renaissance periods, and also that it was further reinforced by the subsequent writings of the Church Fathers, especially St Augustine.[23] The writings of St Augustine (354–430), Bishop of Hippo, exerted enormous influence in formulating major problems of Christian philosophy and indicating their general solutions. The main sources for his teaching lay in the Bible and many Augustinian concepts were based on standard Christian scriptural and doctrinal exegesis, but his interpretations were also guided by the themes of Neoplatonic philosophy.[24] One of the most important themes chosen by Augustine for discussion was his interpretation of the light symbolism in the Bible, which he explained and expanded, embracing at the same time the significant analogy between Christ and the sun.[25] For example, he sums up at one point, in describing Christ, 'The only begotten Son of God, who in many places in Holy Scripture is allegorically termed the sun....'[26] Other references to light symbolism and the Sun–Christ analogy are to be found in Augustine's *City of God*, the *Confessions*, and his treatises on *The Magnitude of the Soul* and *The Immortality of the Soul*.[27] This symbolism also proved useful during discussion of the relationship

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[23]For Augustine, see for example, E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Augustine*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1961.

[24]For Neoplatonic elements in Augustine's works, see *ibid.*, p. 77. Also Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, p. 10f.

[25]For use of the sun/light metaphor in Augustine, see Gilson, *Augustine*, especially pp. 77–96, 'The Light of the Soul.' Gilson emphasizes the Neoplatonic aspects of this, relating Augustine's thought to that of Plotinus and Plato himself.

[26]*Ennarationes*, in Patrologia Latina, pp. 131–133. Quoted by E. G. Dotson, 'An Augustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling. Part 1,' *Art Bulletin*, 61, 1980, pp. 223–256, especially p. 244 and n. 117 on p. 245.

[27]St Augustine, *City of God*, especially pp. 374f., 436f. 450f; *idem*, *Confessions*, (trans. V. J. Bourke) Washington: Catholic University of America Press, Fathers of the Church series, 1953, pp. 180–181, 410–414, 424f.; and *idem*, *The Immortality of the Soul* and *The Magnitude of the Soul* (ed. L. Schopp), New York: Catholic University of America Press, Fathers of the Church series, 1947, pp. 3–50 and 51–152.

between God the Father and God the Son which was a major point of controversy up to Medieval times.[28] The sun metaphor was used by St Augustine to demonstrate how, just as light issues from the sun without taking anything away from it, Christ the Son issued from God the Father without taking anything away from the former.[29] The original source was not diminished and, according to St Augustine, just as the sun and its rays of light were separate yet one, so also was Christ one and the same thing with the Father.

Another important theme which is emphasized in the writings of St Augustine which appears highly significant for a cosmological discussion of the circular design of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco, is Augustine's theory of beauty based on geometric regularity. Again, origins are to be found in Augustine's Neoplatonism for his theory of the circle in relation to cosmic order. Aware of the Platonic concept of order and geometry in the universe, Augustine maintained that the most beautiful figure of all is the circle – perfect and eternal: 'The circle, because of its equality surpasses all other plane figures... what else is the regulator of this symmetry than the point placed in the centre?...Much can be said of the function of the point.'[30] Augustine's view of the symbolism of the circle seems to relate to the same cosmological concepts as outlined above, chapter 2, where the image of the universe was shown to act as a basis for ecclesiastical architectural designs.[31]

The writings of Augustine may serve as a prime example of this type of thinking in Christian doctrine and also as evidence of the currency of such ideas in the sixteenth century, since his writings on Christian dogma received increasing

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[28]See E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1955.

[29]Discussed by Gilson, *Augustine*, pp. 77–96. See also Meiss's discussion on the symbolism of light rays in depictions of the Immaculate Conception, 'Light as Form and Symbol in some Fifteenth–century Painting,' in C. Gilbert (ed.), *Renaissance Art*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, pp. 43–68.

[30]St Augustine, *On the Magnitude of the Soul*, chapters 7–12, especially pp. 71, 75–80, 85 and 89, where he comments on the symbolism of the circle and its 'Godlike harmony.' Of course the central 'Point' of the circular format of Michelangelo's fresco is the figure of Christ Himself.

[31]See Hautecoeur, *Mystique et Architecture*, pp. 145–292.

attention in Renaissance Italy during a marked Augustinian revival. Discussion of such subjects was connected with the clarification of Catholic doctrine and reform at that time.[32] In addition, the influence of Augustinian thought specifically on Michelangelo has been much discussed,[33] so that the artist could easily have been aware of such metaphors and symbolic discussion, and used them intentionally in the same way.

One of the major instigators of the revival of Augustinian thought in the sixteenth century was Egidio (1469–1533), Bishop of Viterbo and a leading authority on doctrinal issues and reform.[34] Egidio played a major part in the clarification of theological doctrines in the early sixteenth century and he too focused on the light–sun metaphor. According to authors like Wind and Dotson,[35] Egidio da Viterbo's interpretation of Augustine holds the key to highly important aspects of Renaissance theology. Further, Wind maintains that Egidio's interpretation of Augustine underlay the meaning of the program of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling frescoes,[36] and Dotson's more recent analysis of the Sistine Chapel ceiling clearly demonstrates its Augustinian content.[37] The common identification of Christ with the sun, which was firmly established by Augustine, was supplemented on the Sistine ceiling, Dotson argues, with Neoplatonic concepts related to Egidio da

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[32]For the Augustinian revival see P. O. Kristeller, 'Augustine and the Early Renaissance,' *Review of Religion*, 8, 1944, pp. 339–358; D. Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 139–139; G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe*, London: Fontana, 1971, p. 193; H. Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, London: Nelson, 1957, p. 364f. Augustine's popularity in Renaissance Italy probably stemmed from his interest in the incorporation of Neoplatonic elements into Christianity.

[33]For example, Dotson, 'Augustinian Interpretation,' especially pp. 250–251.

[34]For Egidio da Viterbo, see Dotson, 'Augustinian Interpretation,' *passim*; J. W. O'Malley, *Rome and the Renaissance. Studies in Culture and Religion*, London: Variorum, 1981; J. C. Olin, *The Catholic Reformation. Savonarola to Ignatious Loyola, Reform in the Church, 1495–1540*, New York: Harper and Row, 1969, pp. 40–53, especially pp. 46–48 for Egidio's use of light symbolism.

[35]Dotson, 'Augustinian Interpretation,' *passim*; E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*, (revised ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 248f.

[36]E. Wind, *Michelangelo's Prophets and Sibyls*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, and *idem*, 'Maccabean Histories in the Sistine Ceiling,' in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, (ed. E. F. Jacob) London: Faber and Faber, 1960, pp. 312–327.

[37]Dotson, 'Augustinian Interpretation,' *passim*.

Viterbo's Neoplatonic interpretation of Augustine, and based on Plato's use of the sun as allegorical for the Divine Mind or World–Soul.[38] According to Dotson, the *Separation of Light from Dark* on the ceiling panel has the figurative meaning of the *Last Judgment*, and the representations of the sun in the ceiling panels, especially in the *Creation of the Sun*, is to be regarded as a symbol of the Son of God and as an allegorical reference to the appearance of Christ in Glory at the time of Judgment. If this is so, it seems highly probable that Michelangelo could have been influenced by the same line of thought when he was working on the fresco for the end wall of the chapel. This reading may also suggest another link between the iconography of ceiling and end wall, apart from the idea of a repetition of Christ as Sun–symbol. In this interpretation, the depiction of the *Separation of Light from Dark* on the First Day on the ceiling immediately above the altar seems to fit in quite logically with the reading of the Last Day (*Last Judgment*) below on the altar–wall, where the saved are separated from the damned. While the iconographical scheme of the chapel as a whole has been the subject of much discussion and dispute,[39] the symbolism of Christ as a cosmic light or sun on both first and last days – the beginning and the end – may also be understood to link these two schemes.[40]

ii) Michelangelo and the Catholic Revival of Early Christian ideas

During the sixteenth century, Egidio da Viterbo was by no means alone in reviving the light symbolism which had been common in Early Christian doctrine and the writings of Augustine. As part of the movement for reform within the Catholic Church, the idea of restoring the basic concepts of Early Christianity, in the simple and sincere forms of the Early Christian Church, was one which was adhered to by many reformers of the sixteenth century, Catholic as well as

[38] *Ibid*, especially pp. 240, 244–245.

[39] For example, De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 102; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 158. Murray suggests that the way the *Last Judgment* might fit into the iconography of the chapel as a whole is problematic.

[40] The natural light in the chapel is discussed by De Tolnay, who comments on the way that the figures of Christ and the Virgin are placed in the best naturally lighted zone (*Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 31–32).

Protestant.[41] Michelangelo's association with Catholic reformers in the 1530's and 1540's is well known. The fact of Michelangelo's involvement, to some degree at least, with the Catholic Reformation has received much comment in the literature but needs to be re–emphasized at this point. It has been widely discussed in connection with many of his late works and in particular with the *Last Judgment.* De Tolnay dwells at length on the idea, as does De Campos; Clements seeks evidence for Michelangelo's interest in reforming ideas, especially in his poetry.[42] De Maio's important work assesses Michelangelo's thinking in the historical context of the Counter Reformation, and other writers like Salmi, Salvini, Hibbard, Murray, Liebert and von Einem also dwell extensively on Michelangelo's connections with the group of Catholic Reformers known as the *Spirituali*, which was eventually centred on the town of Viterbo.[43] The *Spirituali*,[44] included such well known figures as Pole (1500–58), Morone (1509–80) and Contarini (1483–1542), elected Cardinals by Pope Paul III in 1535–36, and Bernardo Ochino (1487–1565), leader of the austere Capuchin order of Franciscans.[45] Michelangelo's connections with this group

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[41]Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, chapter 1, 'The Movement *ad fontes.*'; R. H. Bainton, *Early and Medieval Christianity*, Boston: Beacon, 1962, p.180; Jedin, *Council of Trent*, p. 363.

[42]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, chapters 2 and 3; *idem*, 1975, pp. 103–108, 114 and 184f.; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, chapter 4, section 5; R. Clements, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, London: Owen, 1966, chapters 11 and 17.

[43]De Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, especially chapters 1, 2, 3 and 9; Salmi, *Complete Works*, pp. 261–263; Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, pp. 139–142; Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, pp. 254–263; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 155; Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, p. 158f.; Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, especially chapters 17, 18 and 20 and, most recently, Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 200f.

[44]The *Spirituali* were active in Italy from 1530 (Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, pp. 21–23). The group became centred on Viterbo (where Egidio da Viterbo had greatly contributed to the movement for reform) from about 1540, following Pole's appointment as Papal Governor there (*ibid.* p. 46). For chronology, see also D. Cantimori, 'Italy and the Papacy,' chapter 8 in G. R. Elton (ed.) *New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 2. *The Reformation 1520–1559*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958, pp. 265–274.

[45]For background on these reformers and the Catholic Reformation in Italy, see G. K. Brown, *Italy and the Reformation to 1550*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1933; B. J. Kidd, *The Counter–Reformation, 1550–1600*, London: Church Union Association, 1958 (1st ed. 1933); H. Daniel–Rops, *The Catholic Reformation*, London: Dent, 1962; A. G. Dickens, *The Counter–Reformation*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1968; H. O. Evenett, *The Spirit of the Counter–Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968; G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, Philadelphia: Westminster

have been largely traced through his association with Vittoria Colonna,[46] with whom he was aquainted by at least early 1536.[47] Both De Campos and De Tolnay have emphasized the influence of Vittoria Colonna and the *Spirituali* on the iconography of the *Last Judg...ent*,[48] although Von Einem and Salvini maintain that Michelangelo did not know her, or the circle of Reformers, during the planning stage of the fresco.[49] Although decisions on the basic disposition of the fresco must have taken place earlier, the actual painting did not commence until the summer of 1536 (above, chapter 4), so it is possible to argue some influence of the Catholic reformers, through Vittoria Colonna, on the work. In addition, it should be stressed that Michelangelo's links with this group were not solely dependent on Vittoria Colonna during the 1530's, since the association of Michelangelo with other members of the Catholic Reform movement is also confirmed. The attempt to revive Christianity had been g·ing on for some time; Egidio da Viterbo, and even Savonarola, who have been argued ·s influential on Michelangelo, are often regarded as forerunners of the *Spirituali*.[50] The leading figures of Pole and Contarini were at the Papal Court and

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Press, 1962, especially chapters 21–23; F. D. Church, *The Italian Reformers, 1534–1564*, New York: Octagon, 1974 (1st ed. 1932); J. Tedeschi, 'Italian Reformers and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 2, 1974, pp. 79–94; E. Gleason, 'On the Nature of Sixteenth–century Italian Evangelism, Scholarship, 1953–1978,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 9, 1978, pp. 3–26; S. Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980. For Cardinal Pole, see Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience, passim*; for Ochino, see R. H. Bainton, *Bernardo Ochino; Esule e riformatore senese del cinquecento*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1940, and *idem, The Travail of Religious Liberty*, Hamden: Archon, 1953, chapter 6.

[46]E–M Jung, 'Vittoria Colonna: Between Reformation and Counter–Reformation,' *Review of Religion*, 15, 1951, pp. 144–59 and *idem*, 'On the Nature of Evangelism in Sixteenth–century Italy,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 14, 1953, pp. 511–527. De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, chapter 3; R. H. Bainton, 'Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo,' *Forum*, 9 (1) 1971, pp. 34–41; Shrimplin–Evangelidis, 'Michelangelo and Nicodemism.'

[47]The date of Michelangelo's meeting with Vittoria Colonna is fully discussed by Ramsden, *Letters*, p. 237f. The precise date is nowhere stated, but the most likely appears to be March 1536. Other dates have also been proposed, including 1532 and 1538 and even 1517–21, when both were at the court of Pope Leo X Medici (D. J. McAuliffe, *Vittoria Colonna. Her Formative Years as a Basis for Analysis of her Poetry*, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978, pp. 48–49).

[48]De Campos, *Last Judgment*, p. 84; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 51f.

[49]Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, p. 158; Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 139.

[50]Jung, 'Evangelism,' p. 513. For Michelangelo and Savonarola, see especially Hartt, *Michelangelo*, p. 21f.

close advisers to Paul III from 1534, and Michelangelo's specific association with such members of the intellectual aristocracy has been recorded by contemporaries like Vasari, Condivi and Francisco de Holanda.[51] Furthermore, the Spanish reformer, Juan Valdés, on whose writings much of the thought of the *Spirituali* was founded, was private secretary to Clement VII until the latter's death in 1534.[52] Well before the commencement of the painting of the *Last Judgment*, Michelangelo would thus have been exposed to the ideas of many of these Catholic reformers, who tried to return to the Bible and the Fathers of the Church and, by reviving Christianity in its early and pure forms,[53] to prevent schism in Reformation Europe.

It is important to bear in mind that members of the *Spirituali*, with whom Michelangelo was associated from the 1530's, were not regarded as heretics and schismatics at this time.[54] Up to his death in 1534, Clement VII had given some support to the aims and ideas of the reformers and he was close to Vittoria Colonna.[55] The group was also in contact with Pope Paul III (1534–49) and worked for renewal of the church with the Pope's support: he elected several reformers to the cardinalate in 1535–36 with their reforms in mind, and confirmed the Capuchin order at the same time.[56] In 1537, these cardinals were included in the commission for

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[51]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) pp. 1923–1925; (ed. Bull) pp. 418–422; Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 102; Francisco de Holanda, *Dialogues*, reproduced in C. Holroyd, *Michael Angelo Buonarroti*, London: Duckworth, 1903, pp. 269–327. Although not totally reliable as a source, Holanda's *Dialogues* provide general evidence for meetings and intellectual discussions of this group (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 55–56).

[52]Williams, *Radical Reformation*, p. 529.

[53]For the aims of the Catholic reformers to return to the simple obedience and pure forms of the Early Christian Church, see Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, especially pp. 1–23; McAuliffe, *Vittoria Colonna*, p. 48; Gleason, 'On the Nature of Sixteenth–century Italian Evangelism,' pp. 4 and 20; G. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959; Jung, 'On the Nature of Evangelism,' p. 520; A. Schutte, 'The *Lettere Volgari* and the Crisis of Evangelism in Italy,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28, 1975, pp. 639–688, especially p. 640; Bainton, 'Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna,' p. 40 speaks of 'the general tendency of the Catholic liberal reform to restore primitive Christianity.'

[54]Pastor (*History of the Popes*, vol. 11, pp. 495–496) comments that the Italian religious situation in the 1530's and early 1540's was extremely complex, which appears to be related to the transitional nature of the period.

[55]Elton, *Reformation Europe*, p. 185.

[56]Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, p. 47; Elton, *Reformation Europe*, pp. 183–186; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 11, pp. 94f., 142–144.

the drawing up of the important report, *Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia*, the specified aim of which was to reform the church and prevent heresy.[57] Through the signatories of the *Consilium*, reform in the 1530's was thus linked to the higher reaches of the Catholic Church. This phase of the Catholic Reformation should be distinguished from the later, militant phase of the Counter Reformation. During the 1530's and the early 1540's, this moderate, reforming group undoubtedly had a great deal of influence in the Vatican, but the situation did alter somewhat around 1542, when the period of toleration ended. Contributing factors were the deaths of Valdés (1541) and Contarini (1542), Ochino's apostasy (1542) and the revival of the Roman Inquisition (1542). At this time, the adherents of Italian Evangelism were forced to become more secretive, as they became accused of heresy after 1541–42, and pursued by militants like Cardinal Carafa. The 'Nicodemists,' who outwardly conformed in spite of their sympathies with spiritual reform, flourished during the 1540's and even 50's, but this changed atmosphere clearly postdates the completion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco in October 1541.[58]

The main doctrinal interests of the Italian reforming Evangelist movement in the 1530's have been outlined by E–M. Jung.[59] Among these were a pre–occupation with the question of salvation through Christ's sacrifice, lack of confidence in the efficacy of good works alone, and an emphasis on the supremacy of faith. The most important emphasis of this Catholic Reform movement lay on an intense

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[57]For the *Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia*, 1537, published 1538, see Olin, *Catholic Reformation*, pp. 182–197, which includes a full transcription. The document refers to the teachings of Augustine and expresses a desire to turn back to Christ (p. 197).

[58]See D. Cantimori, 'Submission and Conformity: Nicodemism and the Expectations of a Conciliar Solution to the Religious Question,' in E. Cochrane, (ed.), *The Late Italian Renaissance, 1525–1630*, London: MacMillan, 1970, pp. 244–265; Jung, 'Evangelism,' p. 518–519; H. A. Oberman, 'The Nicodemites. Courageous Alternative to the Refugee,' in E. I. Kouri and T. Scott (eds.) *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe*, London: Macmillan, 1987, pp. 15–20; Shrimplin–Evangelidis, 'Michelangelo and Nicodemism,' (where Michelangelo's self–portrait as Nicodemus in the Florentine *Pietà* is argued as evidence for his involvement with the movement), and *idem*, 'Once More, Michelangelo and Nicodemism,' *Art Bulletin*, 71 (4), 1989, pp. 693–694 for further details and references for the post–1542 situation.

[59]Jung, 'On the Nature of Evangelism,'; and also by Schutte, '*Lettere Volgari*,' pp. 639–688, especially 662 and Cantimori, 'Italy and the Papacy.'

spirituality,[60] which is why these reformers became known as the *Spirituali*. Perhaps the major point at issue between the various reformers was the question of 'Justification by Faith,' namely whether salvation was dependent on good works or faith and spiritual belief, and this is a theme which has been argued, by Steinberg and others, as being expressed in Michelangelo's fresco.[61] It has been suggested that the possible inclusion of veiled references to Justification by Faith in the *Last Judgment* was heretical, in spite of the fact that the Council of Trent did not condemn the doctrine until 1547.[62] In contrast to Steinberg, Hall's discussion of the *Last Judgment* argues for a position on Michelangelo's part that was in line with the stance taken by the church at the time of the commission, clearly demonstrating the official and accepted role of the Catholic Reformers in the late 1530's and early 1540's.[63]

Many of the ideas of the Italian group of reformers were founded on the writings of the Spanish reformer Valdés.[64] Apart from the doctrinal tenets outlined

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[60]Jung ('Evangelism,' p. 513f.) and others have argued a relationship between the spiritual emphasis of the movement and Neoplatonic thought, derived from Ficino as much as, for example, John 3:6. Calvin also recognized the combination of the Italian reformers' ideas with Neoplatonism, since he accused them of reducing Christianity to a philosophy full of Neoplatonic ideas (J. Calvin, *Three French Treatises*, ed. F. M. Higman, London: Athlone Press, 1970, pp. 139–140; see C. N. M. Eire, 'Calvin and Nicodemism. A Reappraisal,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 10, 1979, pp. 45–69).

[61]Steinberg, 'Corner of *Last Judgment*,' pp. 209–210; De Tolnay, 1975, p. 104–107.

[62]Elton, *Reformation Europe*, p. 196. The doctrine of Justification by Faith was not heretical prior to the Council of Trent (held in three sessions 1545–47, 1551–52 and 1561–63). For Catholics, the concept had its basis in Augustinian doctrine, not Luther. Contarini attempted to present a solution amenable to all, 'Double Justification,' when he represented the Pope at the Colloquy of Regensburg, 1541 (Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, pp. 57–59) and Pole advised Colonna 'to believe as if her salvation depended upon faith alone, and to act, on the other hand, as if it depended upon good works' (*ibid.* p. 96).

[63]Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.' For further discussion on these issues see Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, especially p. 53f; O. M. T. Logan, 'Grace and Justification: Some Italian views of the Sixteenth and early Seventeenth centuries,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 20 (1) April 1969, pp. 67–78, and M. W. Anderson, 'Luther's *Sola Fide* in Italy,' *Church History*, 38, 1969, pp. 17–33. Cardinal Pole supported the doctrine of Justification by Faith and, since he was very nearly elected Pope as late as 1549, this could well have become official (Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, pp. 200, 227–229).

[64]For Valdés, see J. Nieto, *Juan Valdés and the origins of the Spanish and Italian Reformation*, Geneva: Droz, 1970; Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, chapter 5; Williams, *Radical Reformation*, pp. 529–536; and A. J. Schutte, *Pier Paolo*

above, one of the major themes stressed in Valdés' thought was the concept discussed at the outset of this chapter, namely that of Christ as the light of the world. In fact, because of the the emphasis on light symbolism of Valdés and his followers, the Valdésians[65] were also known, significantly, as the *Illuminists*, and their doctrine as *Illuminism*.[66] The influence of this type of thought on Michelangelo in the formation of his view of the Sun–Christ of the *Last Judgment* should not be underestimated.

Valdés' common use of light symbolism extended to the use in his writings of a direct sun metaphor, which is discussed by Nieto in his recent study of Valdés' works.[67] Concentrating on the Biblical explanations of spiritual light and the analogy between God and light, Valdés frequently used a direct metaphor more specifically alluding to God as the sun. He describes the way in which the spirit of God illuminates man like the rays of the sun.[68] In the *Considerationes* (c. 1535–36), Valdés describes the Christian man who is like a traveller walking by night until the sun has risen to show him the way.[69]

Similar themes occurred in other religious writings popular in this period which aroused interest amongst members of the Catholic Reformation, for example in the Gospel of Nicodemus,[70] also a possible source for Michelangelo's thought from

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Vergerio. The Making of an Italian Reformer, Geneva: Droz, 1977.

[65]The mysticism of Italian Evangelism was derived from Spanish *Illuminism* and 'the term 'Valdésiani' came to stand for all the 'spirituali,' and for the whole movement of Evangelism which was characterised rather by a common attitude than a defined theological system (Jung, 'Evangelism,' p. 514). For the relationship between Valdés, the *Spirituali* and the Protestants, see Nieto, *Valdés*, pp. 334–335.

[66]For the origins of the *Illuminist* or *Alumbrados* movement in Spain, see Nieto, *Valdés*, p. 56f.; for Valdés' doctrine of the illumination of the spirit, *ibid.*, pp. 232–239.

[67]For Valdés' use of sun and light symbolism, *ibid.*, especially pp. 202–210 and 232–239.

[68]*Ibid*, n. 170 on p. 240.

[69]Valdés, *Considerationes*, p. 46, quoted *ibid*, pp. 212–213. Nieto discusses common ground between the thought of Valdés, Augustinian doctrine and the Neoplatonic revival. He comments especially on similarities in the use of sun and light symbolism and the spirit/flesh dichotomy (pp. 96–97, 108–111, 233f., 294).

[70]The Gospel of Nicodemus was popular during the Medieval period and a vernacular version circulated in late fifteenth–century Italy. See H. C. Kim, *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, Toronto: Centre for Medieval Studies, 1973; W. Stechow,

the 1530's.[71] Sun–symbolism is used here as an allegory for Christ and in particular relation to the 'enlightenment' of man at the time of the *Last Judgment.*[72] Another key work of the Catholic Reformation was the *Trattato Utilissimo del Beneficio di Iesu Cristo Crocifisso.*[73] Its precise date of writing is unknown, but it was probably in preparation during the late 1530's and, although not available in printed form to Michelangelo prior to the *Last Judgment*, is a reflection of the main ideas of the Catholic Reformers circulating at the time. The date of the first edition is unknown but the second edition was printed in 1543 and ran to over forty thousand copies, according to a contemporary source.[74] Probably written by the Benedictine monk, Benedetto da Mantua, and revised by Pole's colleague, Flaminio,[75] the *Beneficio di Cristo* was immensely popular as an expression of current ideas, especially the major theme of the desire to return to the Biblical Christianity of the Early Church.[76] The issue of Justification by Faith received major emphasis and, here, the Gospel of John is stressed, especially the important text of chapter 3, of Christ's teaching to

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'Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus?' *Studien zur Toschanischen Kunst*, Festschrift Heydenreich, (ed. W. Lotz and L. L. Moller), Munich, 1964, p. 298. Although Nicodemism as a movement increased in the post–1542 period, it is not unreasonable to suggest an interest in this Gospel already by the 1530's.

[71]Shrimplin–Evangelidis, 'Michelangelo and Nicodemism,' especially p. 60. See also a later paper by J. Kristof, 'Michelangelo as Nicodemus. *The Florence Pietà*,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20 (2) 1989, pp. 163–182.

[72]M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1969, pp. 94–146, especially pp. 123–124.

[73]An original copy of the first ed. 1543, which is small and easily portable, (actual size 75mm x 106mm, 3" x 4.25") exists in the Library of St John's College, Cambridge. See R. Prelowski, *The Beneficio di Cristo*, translated with an introduction, in *Italian Reformation Studies in Honor of Laelius Socinus* (ed. J. A. Tedeschi), Florence: Le Monnier, 1965, pp. 21–102; E. Gleason, *Reform Thought in Sixteenth–Century Italy*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: American Academy of Religion, 1981, pp. 103–217; Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, pp. 73–88, discusses its dating and summarises content. Written in the vernacular, the *Beneficio di Cristo* was popular with laymen.

[74]It was read and discussed in manuscript form before its publication (Gleason, 'Italian Evangelism,' p. 10) and was defended and circulated by Pole and other members of the Curia, especially the signatories of the *Consilium* (Prelowski, ed., *Beneficio di Cristo*, p. 23f; Gleason, *Reform Thought*, p. 103). The *Beneficio* was eventually condemned by the Inquisition and placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books* in 1549.

[75]Prelowski, ed., *Beneficio di Cristo*, p. 26f.; B. Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985.

[76]Prelowski, ed., *Beneficio di Cristo*, pp. 38–40.

Nicodemus concerning judgment, death and salvation of the spirit.[77] References to light–symbolism in the explanations of Divine power demonstrates the wide use of this type of Christian analogy.[78]

iii) Michelangelo and Early Christian iconography

The importance of the established analogy between Christ and the sun and the revival of this symbolism amongst the Catholic reformers of the sixteenth century demonstrates clearly that such concepts were current, if not commonplace, in theological exegesis at the time of Michelangelo's conception of the *Last Judgment*. This was also arguably linked to the generally expressed wish to return to the pure form of Christianity of the Early Christians.

The actual depiction in art of Christ in the allegorical role of the sun or light was of course not new. The iconography of Christ as symbolic of light, and in the guise of a Sun–symbol related to the form used for the pagan Sun–god Apollo, was part of a strong artistic tradition which had existed parallel to the theological discussions which have been outlined above. Christ's depiction in Late Antique art as a beardless Apollonian–type of Sun–god is well known,[79] and Michelangelo's Sun–Christ perhaps forms the culmination of a visual tradition which had been formulated at the very beginning of the Early Christian period.[80] The athletic,

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[77] *Ibid.*, p. 58 ('God so loved the world that he gave his only–begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have life eternal. God did not send his Son into the world so that he might judge it, but so that the world might be saved through him,' John 3:16–18). According to the *Beneficio*, to claim that salvation comes through our own works and maintain that Christ's sacrifice was not enough is ingratitude and to call God a liar (pp. 53 and 92).

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 59 ('I came into the world as a light, so that everyone who believes in me may not remain in darkness,' John 12:46), pp. 69–70, 94. Christ is perceived as Lord of the Universe, pp. 67, 73.

[79] See for example, A. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1937; A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origins*; D. Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968; J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970; Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*; M. Gough, *The Origins of Christian Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.

[80] De Tolnay and others have referred to the concept of Michelangelo's beardless Christ appearing like an Apollo (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 47) but the comparison with the *pagan* Apollo receives far more emphasis than the *Christianized* form (cf. *ibid.*, 'the figure of the nude pagan god'). De Tolnay claims that the artist

youthful and beardless Apollo–type Christ, far from being a new invention in art or 'a Christ unknown to the faithful,' as Steinberg suggests,[81] was an iconographic type which had been extremely popular in Early Christian times and of which many examples still survived. It may be argued that Michelangelo's interest in the Catholic reformation attempt to revive the ideas of early Christianity, based on the scriptures, could have caused him to reconsider also the Early Christian artistic tradition and, in particular, that which linked Christ with the Sun–god type. Further, it was not necessary for Michelangelo to seek out late antique Christian sources directly because, as will be demonstrated, the form had not altogether died out.

The wide use of the halo, or in the case of Christ a full mandorla, is also linked to the idea of light symbolism as the knowledge of God.[82] The mandorla which often surrounds Christ in versions of the *Last Judgment* is a reference to his role as the Light of the World but this hardly seems to be, by itself, sufficient explanation for the sun–like golden aura behind Michelangelo's youthful, beardless Apollo–type Christ (fig. 55). That Michelangelo's use of the beardless Christ has connections with the type of Early Christian iconography which analogized Christ to the Sun appears to be far more likely, in the context of Michelangelo's known associations with the Catholic reformation.

In the early days of the Christian religion, visual reinforcement of the Scriptures appeared necessary in order to convince pagans used to idolatry. The similarities between early depictions of the incarnate Christian God and late antique

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has expressed the Christian content by means of a pagan form, rather than emphasising the fact that the beardless type of Sun–Christ was a wholly Christianized iconographic type, to which Michelangelo was probably presenting a conscious reference and for very specific reasons.

[81]Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 49.

[82]For comment on the origins and complex iconography of the halo and aureole, see E. Hall and H. Uhr, '*Aureola super Auream*, Crowns and related symbols in Late Gothic and Renaissance Iconography,' *Art Bulletin*, 67 (4) Dec. 1985, pp. 568–603. Apart from the circular gold area around Christ, Michelangelo dispenses with haloes altogether in the *Last Judgment*. Thin circlets had replaced golden discs in many sixteenth century works and are also sometimes omitted altogether, e. g. in works by Leonardo da Vinci and in some of the paintings of the lateral walls of the Sistine Chapel.

versions of the Roman Sun–god Apollo are evidently not coincidental but rather associated with an intent to gain converts in the early days.[83] It was a short step from the scriptural and literary analogy between Christ and solar themes (dealt with at the beginning of this chapter), to the formation of a more specific visual analogy between Christ and the actual accepted form of the pagan Sun–god, Apollo or Helios. As in the written sources, the visual image of the pagan Sun–god Apollo was thus adopted for the image of Christ, and the portrayal of Christ as the sun or the Sun–god was embodied in the concept of Christ as the *true* Sun having replaced the former pagan gods.[84] Lack of details of Christ's actual physical appearance in early written accounts suggests that His physical appearance had not initially been considered important, especially in the iconoclastic east.[85] In the western empire, however, similarities between Christ and a recognized youthful god (namely Apollo) were emphasized, and Christ and Apollo were thus viewed as visual equivalents in Early Christian times. This iconography was apparently utilised in order to allow Christianity to present more readily acceptable visual forms to the pagan masses. Since the Sun–god Apollo was the son of Zeus (Father of Heaven) and renowned for being good–willed and clement, but strong and powerful, even vengeful when necessary, he was perhaps a logical choice for candidacy for equation with the Christian son of God as incarnate on earth.[86] The significance of the symbolism of the sun, as source of light, heat and life itself, was common to both the pagan god and to Christ, and would have served as an additional reason for the identity; as would the appeal which the concept of youthfulness and perfection might have had to early Christian converts. In Early Christian art therefore, Christ was depicted in a manner quite similar to that of the Roman Apollo – namely as a vigorous, youthful

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[83]Visual material related to existing known forms was thus utilized in order to reinforce the Scriptural analogy of Christ as the Light of the World or the sun. The adaptation of certain pagan rites and forms to Christian worship has already been discussed in section i above. See especially Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, chapter 4.

[84]Shapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art*, pp. 115–125.

[85]This problem is discussed in *Encyclopedia of World Art*, vol. 3, cols. 596–600.

[86]See table of comparison in Hannay, *Symbolism*, p. 314.

and muscled figure, often with short tunic and bare limbs, fairly closely cropped hair in the Roman style and, significantly, beardless.[87] And Michelangelo's Christ of the *Last Judgment* evidently bears comparison with this traditional Early Christian type.

Surviving examples of the Apollo–type Christ are relatively common in Late Antique art. A floor mosaic of about 520 at Beth Alpha is a fine example of the Deity as Sun–symbol (fig. 11), as also the sixth–century theophany of Christ at Dawit, already mentioned, where Christ is youthful and beardless. Examples may also be found in mainland Greece which clearly attest to the existence of the tradition of the beardless, youthful Christ in this area as well.[88] More pertinently, as possible source material for Michelangelo, examples are also quite plentiful in Italy and could therefore have played a part in the formulation of Michelangelo's concept. Here especially, existing forms of pagan Roman art were taken over and adapted to fit in with Biblical concepts, and the classical Apollo type figure was frequently integrated with the Biblical idea of Christ as the sun or light of the world. It was often also used in conjunction with the theme of Christ as the Good Shepherd, possibly because one of Apollo's duties was to guard the herds and flocks of the gods.[89] Christ may be depicted beardless with short hair and tunic, as in earlier, third century examples (fig. 72), or, more commonly, with longer robes and lengthier hair,

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[87]Within the Christian Church, as also in ancient Roman times, the wearing of a beard was less a matter of personal choice or fashion than a symbolic or religious gesture which merits some comment here. The beardlessness of the Graeco–Roman sun–god (Apollo–Helios) probably derives from his role as a warrior (Alexander the Great prohibited beards in his armies in battle). According to the Bible, to cut off the beard signified mourning (Isaiah 15:2, Jeremiah 48:37) as in ancient Roman culture. Beards had generally been discouraged amongst the clergy in the Western Church (although worn in the East in emulation of Christ), but increased in popularity in the sixteenth century (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed. G. Herbermann et al., New York: Encyclopaedia Press, 1913, 15 vols., vol. 2 p. 362–363). Many sixteenth–century Popes were beardless (Leo X, Julius III, Marcellus II and Paul IV), others bearded (Paul III). Clement VII grew a beard specifically as a sign of mourning after the Sack of Rome, 1527; conversely, Julius II had shaved his beard in 1512 'because things were going well' (see L. Partridge and R. Starn, *A Renaissance Likeness*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 42–47).

[88]For example, at Hosios David in Thessaloniki, fifth century (Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, p. 117 and fig. 280).

[89]Graves, *Greek Myths*, p. 77.

but still beardless (figs. 73). Even when longer robes are used, stylistic characteristics show similarities with the antique concepts of physical proportion since (in contrast with the Byzantine type) bodily form is suggested beneath draperies of voluminous Roman toga–like garments (fig. 74).

This western depiction of Christ contrasts with the slightly later eastern orthodox portrayal of the dark, long–haired and bearded Christ of the Byzantine type, from which the standard type developed, although sometimes both types co–exist. Examples of the Apollonian–type beardless Christ survive especially on the eastern coast of Italy at Ravenna. There is no concrete evidence that Michelangelo could have viewed these examples[90] but the type is common here, in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia (c. 430) where the beardless Christ is depicted as the Good Shepherd (fig. 73), in St Apollinare Nuovo (mid–sixth–century), where the beardless Christ of the *Miracles* series (fig. 75) exists side by side with the bearded Christ of the *Passion* series, and in St Vitale (sixth–century), where the beardless Christ is seated on the sphere of the universe (fig. 10).[91] Vasari's pejorative descriptions and his scathing attacks on the 'awkwardness and crudeness' of the 'Greek' style demonstrates an awareness of such monuments even if he did not regard them highly.[92] The arousal of Michelangelo's interest from the 1530's in Christian revival and reform does, however, make it seem possible that he would have re–considered this type of iconography.

The beardless Apollo–type of Christ which has reference to His role as an equivalent to the Sun–Deity is also to be found in Early Christian mosaics elsewhere in Italy. A good example still exists at Milan in the apse of St Aquilino, fifth century (fig. 74), and nearby in the frescoes of Castelseprio, sixth century.[93]

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[90]For information on Michelangelo's travels in Italy, see chapter 3 above. Michelangelo's knowledge of the type at Ravenna is not necessarily to be excluded since he visited nearby Ferrara in 1530.

[91]A. Paolucci, *Ravenna, an Art Guide*, Ravenna: Edizioni Salera, 1971; P. A. Martinelli, *L'imagine de Cristo nell'antica Arte Ravennate*, Faenza: Fratelli, 1969.

[92]Vasari, Preface to the *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) pp. 28–29, 33–35; (ed. Bull) pp. 33, 38, 45.

[93]See M. Shapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1980, pp. 115–125, for discussion of Christ as Sun–symbol at

Michelangelo did not travel to Milan, but his contemporary, Bramante, was a native of Milan, and Bramante's designs for St Peter's on a central domed plan demonstrate interest in the revival of Early Christian forms of church building and decoration. It has even been arg at he actually based his concept for St Peter's on the design of the Early Christian church of St Aquilino.[94] Michelangelo could well have learned of mosaics like this through such contacts. The similarity between Christ's gesture in this fifth–century Milan mosaic (fig. 74) and the gesture of Christ in Michelangelo's fresco is also suggestive of a possible link.

More important than these examples are instances of the Early Christian beardless Apollo–type Christ in areas known to have been accessible to Michelangelo, especially in Rome itself. Here familiarity, coupled with an interest in the revival of Christianity in its original forms, could well have led to an iconographical influence on Michelangelo. Mention is made of a conscious Early Christian revival in the decorations of the Sistine Chapel even prior to Michelangelo.[95] The earliest examples of this iconography in Christian art at Rome are in the Vatican grottoes and in the catacombs,[96] where the beardless type of Christ is depicted (for example fig. 72), clearly demonstrating the existence of the tradition.

The systematic investigation of the catacombs took place in the second half

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Castelseprio.

[94]For the sixteenth–century revival of the central–domed plan, see R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, London: Tiranti, 1962. Wittkower argues that the popularity of the harmonious circular plan was based on the known cosmic significance of buildings like Sta Costanza, Rome (fourth–century), and also related to the writings of Alberti and Filarete on domes and circles and their symbolic meaning. For recent study of the contacts between Michelangelo and Bramante, see C. Robertson, 'Bramante, Michelangelo and the Sistine Ceiling,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 49, 1986, pp. 91–105. It is perhaps significant that, when Michelangelo later reverted to the centralised plan in his design for St. Peter's, he was accused of creating a church 'in the image of the sun's rays,' Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 291 and 309–310.

[95]See J. Shearman, *Raphael's Cartoons in the Royal Collection*, London: Phaidon, 1972, p. 7 ('the chapel and its decoration were already distinguished by conscious revival in form and symbolism of Medieval and Early Christian usage'), and L. D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1965, p. 12 ('the return to Early Christian usage').

[96]See F. Mancinelli, *Catacombs and Basilicas. The Early Christians in Rome*, Firenze: Scala, 1987; Gough, *Origins of Christian Art*.

of the sixteenth century, but the existence of ancient buildings and catacombs beneath Rome and beneath St Peter's itself had been known of long before the sixteenth century.[97] Some ancient buildings had been excavated before the end of the fifteenth century, as, for example, the Domus Aurea or Golden House of Nero.[98] This is confirmed artistically by certain decorative elements in the work of artists like Ghirlandaio, to whom Michelangelo was apprenticed for a short while.[99] Michelangelo's direct knowledge of the underground excavations is confirmed by his drawing of the archers in the Volta Dorata.[100] Knowledge of underground remains in Rome is also confirmed by Cellini (1500–71) in his biography, where he refers specifically to 'certain underground caves in Rome which in ancient times were used as dwelling rooms, studies, halls and so forth.'[101] Vasari also referred to 'buildings in Rome ...[which] were buried under the ruins and only in our own day have many of the rare works been rediscovered.'[102] Of course in the sixteenth century there was some confusion by Vasari and others over whether these ancient works were pagan or Christian in origin, but antique works in the classical style would undoubtedly have aroused interest and not have been bracketed with the Byzantine or Medieval 'monstrosities' which Vasari disliked.

Some of the grottoes beneath St Peter's had been discovered during the demolition and rebuilding of St Peter's with which Michelangelo became deeply involved.[103] Significantly, one of the finest examples of the early depiction of Christ as

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[97]E. Kirschbaum, *The Tombs of St Peter and St Paul*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1959, p. 25.

[98]N. Dacos, *La Découverte de la Domus Aurea et la Formation des Grotesques à la Renaissance*, London: Warburg Institute, 1969; S. Sandstrom, *Levels of Unreality. Studies in Structure and Construction in Italian Mural Painting during the Renaissance*, Uppsala: Almquist and Wiksells, 1963, p. 20.

[99]*Vasari, Lives*, (ed. de Vere) pp. 1833–1835; (ed. Bull) p. 327f. (Compare Condivi, *Life Of Michelangelo*, pp. 9–10).

[100]*Ibid.*, pp. 9f., 25 and fig. 21; for Michelangelo's drawing of *The Archers*, see Hirst, *Michelangelo Drawings*, colourplate 6.

[101]B. Cellini, *Autobiography* (trans. G. Bull), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, p. 63.

[102]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 37; (ed. Bull) p. 37.

[103]Kirschbaum, *Tomb of St Peter*, p. 25; G. Holmes, *Florence, Rome and the Origins of the Renaissance*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, p. 132f. For Michelangelo's involvement with the rebuilding of St Peter's see Murray, *Life, Work and Times*,

a beardless Apollo–type Sun–god is actually in those grottoes (mausoleum M) beneath St Peter's itself (fig. 76).[104] This mausoleum, with its outstanding mosaic dated to the third century, was rediscovered in the twentieth century but evidence provided by the records of the excavations suggests that the vault had been opened before on other unrecorded occasions. Documentation confirms that it was known by the late sixteenth century.[105]

Amongst the surviving Early Christian basilicas and churches of Rome, such as Sta Costanza (c. 350), Sta Pudenziana (c. 387–90) and SS Cosmas and Damian (526–30),[106] specific depictions in mosaic of the beardless Apollonian–type Christ are less common, although the general type of classical imagery and the Early Christian style is evident in the portrayal of short–haired, beardless figures of holy personages in the Roman style. Especially notable are the mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore (400–440),[107] that immense Christian basilica in which Michelangelo had at one time expressed a desire to be buried.[108] The nave panels of mosaics are well preserved and typical of Early Christian style and iconography, with innumerable figures of saints and angels (significantly wingless) depicted in the Roman manner (fig. 77). It is interesting to note also that in the apse mosaic (a thirteenth–century restoration by

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pp. 202–206.

[104]Kirschbaum, *Tomb of St Peter*, pp. 35–39. Kirschbaum also mentions here the Christian adaptation of the sun–symbolism of antiquity, Christ–Helios, (pp. 40–42), relating it, in the context of this mosaic to the liturgical explanation of Sunday (Day of the Sun).

[105]The earliest description of the tomb was that of Tiberio Alfarano (1574), but Kirschbaum's records of the 1950's excavations show it had been opened previously, as for example, when its entrance had been walled up by the foundations for a column for the new St Peter's at an unspecified date (p. 36).

[106]See Mancinelli, *Catacombs and Basilicas*, pp. 51–59; W. Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1967; Hautecoeur, *Mystique et Architecture*, p. 186f., discusses several examples where the sun analogy is signified even if Christ is not beardless (see figs. 110–120 and fig. 136, a reconstruction of the apse of the Old St Peter's). The mosaics of Old St Paul's were destroyed by fire in the nineteenth century, but G. Partley, *Mirabilia Roma*, 1869, described the mosaics: 'The majestic head of the Lord appears like the sun god amid his rays' (cited by Kirschbaum, *Tombs*, pp. 193–4).

[107]For these see W. Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1967, pp. 73–89; Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, p. 139f. and fig. 274, *Three Celestial Visitors.*

[108]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 90 and n. 101 on p. 140.

Jacopo Torriti) the sun and moon are depicted beneath the figures of Christ and the Virgin, apparently according to the symbolism of *Revelations* 1:16 and 12:1.

Apart from Michelangelo's possible knowledge of these Early Christian monuments, there is also the strong likelihood of his knowing similar depictions of the beardless Christ on smaller artefacts of a general type, like ivories, antique sarcophagi or even manuscripts, although the dates of re–discovery of these small works are hard to trace with any precision (typified by fig. 78).[109] Early Christian artefacts were more frequently included in Renaissance collections than is often supposed, alongside classical and pagan examples, sometimes with little distinction between the two types.[110] Examples of sarcophagi in Renaissance collections in Rome and Florence, at the Duomo and in the possession of Lorenzo de' Medici, would have been familiar to Michelangelo, as well as groups at Pisa and in Rome itself.[111] Bober demonstrates the contemporary interest in sarcophagi and their influence on Renaissance art, and comments on 'their sheer ubiquity' as 'the single most accessible class of ancient art to inspire subsequent artists.' She discusses direct borrowings and draws attention to the interest in Early Christian examples as well as in pagan subjects such as the Apollo theme.[112]

The influence specifically of antique sarcophagi on Renaissance, and even proto–Renaissance artists, is well known: their importance for the Pisani, among

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[109]Examples are numerous. See for example Grabar, *Beginnings of Christian Art*, fig. 304 (ivory). and *idem*, *Christian Iconography*, figs. 113 (terracotta), 171 (glass vase), 204 (ivory diptych).

[110]R. Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969, discusses the Renaissance attitude towards ancient remains and artefacts, both classical and pagan. He gives details of several writers and collectors (Bondo, Rucellai, Fulvio) who showed an interest in Late Antique Christian works as well as ancient pagan remains and he detects an enthusiasm for Early Christian mosaics and other late antique Christian masterpieces in the mid–fifteenth century (chapter 6). Commenting on interest in remains outside Rome itself he also mentions the circulation of publications in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century concerning the Early Christian remains at Ravenna (pp. 108–109, 123–124) and the collecting of Early Christian inscriptions (p. 157). He also notes that the collection of Lorenzo de' Medici included Early Christian ivories (pp. 186–187).

[111]De Tolnay (*Michelangelo*, vol. 3, p. 65) emphasises Michelangelo's reference to ancient sarcophagi, for example, in the Medici tombs.

[112]P. P. Bober and R. O. Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, especially pp. 31, 50, 69–72, 76–77.

others, has been carefully traced.[113] Relevance for fifteenth–century painters is also clear when one notes, for example, the emphasis given to the inscribed classical sarcophagus in the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, c. 1485, by Ghirlandaio.[114] Antique sarcophagi, both pagan and Christian, which depict the beardless Apollo or the Christian Apollo–Christ [illegible] in Rome and Florence to such an extent that knowledge of them in the time of Michelangelo may be assumed. One of the most famous of Early Christian sarcophagi is that of Junius Bassus (fourth century), which had been discovered by the mid to late sixteenth century. Christ is here depicted young and beardless, in cosmological terms as the master of the universe above the arch of Heaven (fig. 79).[115] Although this particular example may have been unknown at the time of the *Last Judgment*, the Junius Bassus sarcophagus is by no means the sole example of the type.[116]

Of course the purely pagan monuments, many of which bore reference to the pagan god Apollo, were also plentiful in Rome and aroused great interest during the Renaissance. Influence of classical statuary upon Renaissance artists, especially Michelangelo, has received much comment and does not need to be re–examined in detail here. Seznec draws attention to the way in which interest in the various pagan gods was revived during the Renaissance, and Wind comments on the revival of 'Pagan Mysteries.'[117] Neither of these authors, however, presents the Renaissance as an era of neopaganism; they both emphasize the way in which classical references were utilized by the advocates of the classical revival, but within a Christian

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[113]See J. Pope–Hennessy, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, London: Phaidon, 1972. Pope–Hennessy also draws attention to Maitani's incorporation of 'lost souls' emerging from antique sarcophagi in his *Last Judgment* panel at Orvieto, *ibid.*, pp. 19–21.

[114]Illustrated in P. and L. Murray, *The Art of the Renaissance*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, p. 255.

[115]Grabar, *Beginnings of Christian Art*, pp. 246–249 and figs. 41, 273–275.

[116]See Mancinelli, *Catacombs and Basilicas*; Grabar, *Beginnings of Christian Art*, and *idem.*, *Christian Iconography*, for further examples of Early Christian sarcophagi and statuettes discovered at various dates in and around the Vatican. The majority show the beardless Christ.

[117]J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, New York: Harper, 1961; E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

framework.[118] Blunt demonstrates the fusion of Classical and Christian ideas during the Renaissance and the incorporation of pagan doctrines and symbolism into Christianity.[119] As far as examples of the classical god Apollo are concerned, one has only to consider the famous example of the *Apollo Belvedere* (discovered by 1491) and this pagan work has been indicated as possible source material for Michelangelo's Christ. The drapery and hairstyle of the *Apollo Belvedere* and Pope Clement's interest in the work, ordering its restoration in 1532, make this seem likely.[120] The idea that such classical forms were sometimes given Christian meaning in Michelangelo's work, according to the tradition outlined above, also requires due emphasis. It does seem plausible, however, that, in view of his involvement with the movement for religious reform, Michelangelo developed his idea of the Apollo Sun–Christ of the *Last Judgment* from antique Christian sources of the type discussed, rather than looking only at pagan monuments, and utilizing the classical Apollo–type form for his depiction of Christ without any reference to the Early Christian tradition. The influence on Michelangelo of Roman remains like sarcophagi, mosaics and frescoes (which were at once classical in style while Christian in content) should not be discounted, and there thus appears to be sufficient evidence to demonstrate not only that the beardless Apollo–type Christ was an established iconographic type, but also that Michelangelo undoubtedly would have had access to it. The close correlation between the traditional iconography of the Sun–Christ and Michelangelo's Christ of the *Last Judgment* suggests that it should therefore be considered in the Early Christian context – not

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[118]For the Renaissance attempts to incorporate classical thought with Christian philosophy, see especially Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, *passim*, and chapter 7 below.

[119]Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 109.

[120]For the Apollo Belvedere as source, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 113. Clement VII had also been responsible for the purchase of the *Belvedere Torso*, another possible reference to Apollo. (See A. Levy, 'A Papal Penchant for Classical Art,' *Art News*, Oct. 1981, pp. 86–89; *idem.*, 'The Tormented History of the *Apollo Belvedere*,' *ibid.*, pp. 124–125). Other pagan classical works extant in Rome which may be pertinent include the *Horsetamers* on the Capitoline. Their striding poses, with upraised arms, in particular appear to be related to Michelangelo's Christ (see E. Pogany–Balas, *The Influence of Rome's Antique Monumental Sculptures on the Great Masters of the Renaissance*, Kiado: Budapest, 1980, plates 1–7).

simply as a borrowing of the antique, classical and pagan form of the god Apollo as suggested by De Tolnay, nor as an heretical form as suggested by Steinberg. While De Tolnay does comment briefly on the existence of the Christian tradition of the fusing of Christ with the Sun–god Apollo (as the *Sol Invictus* becomes the *Sol Iustitiae*),[121] he views Michelangelo's depiction as wholly paganized and does not fully examine the relation with the Early Christian type. He states:

> It has often been said, and rightly so, that this is no longer the Christ of the Gospels, but rather a divinity of Olympus. This fact has been interpreted as a manifestation of the fundamental paganism of the artist, which also reveals itself in other features such as the angels without wings, the saints without halos, the nudity of almost all the figures, the Charon and Minos scene, etc. It is thought to be a striking paradox that the Last Judgment painted for the Chapel of the Popes in the Vatican in fact 'celebrates the paganizing of Christian art.'[122]

Owing to the Scriptural and Early Christian tradition of the Sun–Christ which has been outlined above, Michelangelo's view in this context could as convincingly be argued as wholly Christianized and to bear a secondary, rather than primary, reference to the original pagan deity. The question of Michelangelo's 'fundamental paganism' will be further discussed in the course of this thesis, but, as will be demonstrated, references in Michelangelo's work to themes in antique art and Neoplatonism are neither pagan nor heretical but frequently integrated into Christian philosophy with the fervour of one involved in the deeply religious questions of the age.[123]

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[121]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 47; *idem*, *Michelangelo*, 1975, p. 59.

[122]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 38. Réau, *Iconographie*, makes similar comments concerning 'Le Paganisme foncier de Michel–Ange,' p. 753; also, more recently, Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 355.

[123]That the Reformation took place at all is a reflection of the deep religious feeling of the age, not, as is often supposed, a symptom of growing agnosticism. That the aims of Neoplatonism were not the creation of a neopaganism will be further discussed in chapter 7 below. It is difficult to see how any part of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, even the inclusion of Charon and Minos, could be regarded as 'pagan.'

iv) The Continuation of the Sun–Christ tradition

In the same way that the written tradition of the analogy between Christ and the sun received renewed emphasis during the Renaissance, so also the visual reinforcement of the concept was continued. During the period between Early Christian art and the time of the Renaissance, it has previously been assumed that the depiction of the youthful beardless Christ was completely superseded by the dark, bearded type in western Europe. The depiction of the former type did not, however, entirely die out. Some of the best remaining examples are in Medieval manuscripts which show that the tradition did continue to a certain measure at least, although the bearded type was, admittedly, much more common. The youthful beardless Christ reappeared in the ninth and tenth centuries in Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts and later in Bibles of the twelfth century.[124] Such works kept the traditional iconographic identity between Christ and the Apollo–type Sun–god alive through the Middle Ages (figs. 80 and 81).

A very conspicuous, almost life–size example, in mosaic, from the thirteenth century of the beardless Christ, with cosmic overtones and starry background, is to be found in a prominent position on the north wall of the nave of St Mark's in Venice, (fig. 82).[125] Clearly identified as Christ by the inscription, this example serves as further evidence of the availability of this type and is related, perhaps, to the attempts made in the late Medieval period to restore the Italian churches to their ancient, paleo–Christian grandeur.[126] Even more remarkable is the direct visual

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[124]For example, the Godescale Evangelistary, c. 781 (D. Thomas, *The Face of Christ*, London: Hamlyn, 1975, p. 55); the Metz fragment, c. 870 (*ibid.*, p. 56); the Gero Codex, tenth century (*ibid.*, p. 32); the Pantheon Bible, 12th century (A. Grabar, *Romanesque Painting*, Geneva: Skira, 1958, p. 137); Bodleian Bible, twelfth century (Thomas, *Face of Christ*, p. 54).

[125]O. Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, vol. 2, plates, fig. 16. Michelangelo's several visits to Venice are recorded. Another thirteenth–century example, in Rome itself, is to be found in S Giovanni a Porta Latina, illustrated in Zahlten, *Creatio*, fig. 23.

[126]The apse of Sta Maria Maggiore, Rome was restored in mosaic at this time. Chastel notes a similar revival of the fashion for mosaic icons in the late fifteenth century (for example, Florence, Duomo) as part of a 'dream of restoring the splendour of paleo–Christian painting.' See A. Chastel, *The Flowering of the Italian Renaissance*, New York: Odyssey, 1965, p. 81; Oakeshott, *Mosaics of Rome*, chapter 7, 'The Roman Renaissance as expressed in Mosaics.'

reference to the Sun–Christ in works of the Renaissance, by artists like Dürer. His engraving *Sol Iustitiae* or *The Judge*, 1499 (fig. 83), is clearly a reference to the scriptural sources like Malachi 4:2, which linked the Messiah with the Sun–symbol at the time of Judgment, since it corresponds closely to a contemporary text on this subject and was made at a time when Judgment was expected to be imminent (in 1500). Amongst Dürer's illustrations of the Apocalypse, his interpretation of the text of Revelations 10:1 also makes use of the Sun–symbol (fig. 84).[127] The facial resemblance of Dürer's engraving of *Sol Iustitiae* (fig. 83) to the Venetian mosaic (fig. 82) is perhaps accounted for by his visit to Venice in 1494–95, and his use of this type here for the 'Sun of Righteousness' shows that the beardless Apollo–type Christ was well known and regarded as a Sun–symbol during the Renaissance. It was associated with the cosmological depiction of Christ as the sun, especially at the time of Judgment. In addition, the origins of the type in the conscious adaptation of the figure of Apollo to Christ also seems to have been known to Dürer, as is confirmed by his own writings: 'the same proportions the heathens assigned to their idol Apollo, we shall use for Christ the Lord, the fairest of them all.'[128]

The beardless and youthful Apollo–type of Christ also recurs in some examples of Italian art of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century. These prove on closer examination to be fairly numerous: a drawing of the *Lamentation* by Jacopo Bellini of the 1440's shows a beardless Christ with His sarcophagus,[129] and a sarcophagus is also included in Castagno's well known depiction of a beardless Apollonian–type Christ in his fresco of the *Resurrection*, 1447–49 (fig. 85), in S Apollonia in Florence.[130] As with Michelangelo's Christ, Castagno's version is beardless and also has his right arm raised, but it has not received attention as possible source material for Michelangelo (compare also figures 40, 44, 46, 74). In

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[127]As mentioned (this chapter, n. 14), the 'mighty angel' of Revelations 10:1, whose face was 'as it were the sun,' has been identified with Christ.

[128]Quoted by E. H. Gombrich, 'Criticism in Renaissance Art,' in C. S. Singleton (ed.), *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967, p. 11.

[129]Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, fig. 57.

[130]M. Horster, *Andrea del Castagno*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1980, p. 25f.

the adjacent frescoes of the *Crucifixion* and *Lamentation*, Castagno again depicts Christ beardless, but his use of the type has not been adequately explained; it is perhaps an indication of a consciousness of the Early Christian type, gained from mosaics and sarcophagi.[131] Two versions of the *Lamentation* (of the 1470's) by Cosimo Tura also show Christ beardless and in one of these an antique sarcophagus, possibly the source for the motif, is shown.[132] It does appear to be significant that in the examples of the Italian Quattrocento, Christ is depicted beardless more often in scenes which relate to the events of the *Passion* and especially the *Lamentation*, so the feature is evidently not simply associated with youth.

Botticelli also chose to depict Christ youthful and beardless in several works, including the *Lamentation* theme.[133] The *Lamentation* now in Munich, dating from the early 1490's (fig. 86), clearly depicts Christ as youthful, athletic and beardless and a sarcophagus is revealed in the background. It seems significant that this work was made for the church of St Paolino, whose prior was the Neoplatonist Poliziano, tutor to Michelangelo.[134] A later version by Botticelli, know as the Poldi–Pezzoli *Pietà*, c. 1495, and painted as an altarpiece for Sta Maria Maggiore, is less distinct. In a late work, Botticelli again portrayed Christ beardless and 'rayed' in the *Transfiguration* (fig. 87), according to the text 'and His face did shine as the sun,' (Matthew 17:2); Filippino Lippi, pupil of Botticelli, made use of the same iconography in his drawing of the resurrected Christ appearing to St Mary Magdalene.[135] In Botticelli's example of the *Transfiguration*, as with the example of

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[131]*Ibid.*, p. 25. Horster compares Castagno's Christ here with the beardless Christ painted by Piero della Francesca on the pinnacle of his *Madonna della Misericordia*. The Venetian mosaic (fig. 82) is again a possible source, since Castagno lived and worked in Venice in 1442.

[132]*Ibid.*, fig. 169; L. Venturi, *Italian Painting*, Geneva: Skira, 1950, p. 158. About the same date, the same facial type occurs in the *Baptism* by Francesco Francia (Thomas, *Face of Christ*, p. 16).

[133]R. Lightbown, *Botticelli, Life and Works*, 2 vols. London: Paul Elek, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 112–113, 140, colourplate 6 and plates 38 and 51.

[134]*Ibid.*, p. 112. See p. 40f., for Poliziano (Politian) and his influence on Botticelli, p. 88f. See Murray, *Michelangelo, Life , Work and Times*, p. 16, for his influence on Michelangelo.

[135]Thomas, *Face of Christ*, p. 15.

the *Sol Iustitiae* by Dürer, it appears highly significant the beardless Apollonian–type Christ is chosen for the illustration of a Biblical text specifically associated with the Sun–Christ analogy.

Neoplatonic ideas as well as the religious reforms of Savonarola could have influenced Botticelli's depiction of Christ – and these are themes to which Michelangelo was also exposed, as will be discussed further below. These influences may not, however, constitute a possible explanation for the earlier Quattrocento examples mentioned above, where, in the cases of Castagno, Bellini and Tura, one can only assume an interest in paleo–Christian forms and a consciousness of the Early Christian type from rediscovered antique sources like sarcophagi, ivories or mosaics. In the case of these beardless Christs, especially in works by artists like Botticelli, the interest in classical, pagan gods such as Apollo may have served as a contributing factor, but Christian meaning is given to pagan and Platonic philosophy. It does seem more than mere coincidence that Botticelli and Michelangelo used a similar iconography in this respect, when the important influences of Neoplatonism, Savonarola and, as we shall see, Dante, were common to both artists. The purely Christian context of the Sun–symbol is also made clear by late fifteenth–century use of Sun–bursts and designs which have no allusion to any classical Deity, but only to the Christian symbol. In Ghirlandaio's frescoes in the Sassetti Chapel, the Sun–symbol is used for Christ, and again, significantly, in the Medici Palace (fig. 88).[136] This use of the Sun–symbol may be compared with another typical example in the Florentine style, at Sulmona, where sun and lamb are combined (fig 89).[137]

In the sixteenth century itself, examples of the beardless Christ are still to be found, such as in Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition*, 1521, and *Risen Christ*, 1528–30,

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[136]E. Borsook and J. Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinita, Florence*, Doornspijk: Davaco, 1981, p. 31, fig. 19 and figs. B and C.

[137]Engler, *Die Sonne*, fig. 585. Similar but earlier examples of this type of symbol are given by Baltrusaitis, 'Quelques Survivances,' pp. 75–82; see also F. N. Arnoldi, 'L'iconographie du Soleil dans la Renaissance Italienne,' Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil à la Renaissance*, Colloque International, Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1965, pp. 519–538.

Pontormo's *Supper at Emmaeus*, 1525 (rather indistinct),[138] and the *Flagellation* by Sebastiano del Piombo, 1516–21.[139] Amongst Michelangelo's own works, several drawings use a similar facial type, such as his *Resurrection* drawings (figs. 90, 91), which are approximately contemporary with the commission of the *Last Judgment*, being related either to the Medici chapel lunettes or the possible earlier proposal for a *Resurrection* in the Sistine Chapel. The *Crucifixion* drawing for Vittoria Colonna is too indistinct to permit certainty in this regard (fig. 92).[140]

It is thus erroneous to suggest that in the Italian Renaissance the beardless Apollo–type Christ was completely out of the ordinary and unknown, or that it implied heresy at the time,[141] although this type was admittedly less common. It is evident that an ongoing tradition had existed in Italy of this type of portrayal of Christ. Even if it was rather sporadic, there was some revival of the type in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. It is on occasion specifically related to Biblical texts concerning the analogy between Christ and the sun, as well as to classical prototypes, as part of an ancient tradition. Whether Michelangelo's beardless Judge of the Sistine Chapel was a deliberate revival of the Early Christian depiction of Christ as a Sun–symbol evidently merits further consideration. The currency in Italy at the time of such ideas, based on scripture and propagated by Catholic reformers, interested in the revival of the primitive forms of Christianity, tends towards a reinforcement of the argument.

Along the same lines, it may also be argued that Michelangelo's depiction of wingless angels,[142] and halo–less saints[143] in the *Last Judgment* and the 'live' crucified

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[138]Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, figs. 375 and 380; Thomas, *Face of Christ*, p. 22. Compare Caravaggio's version as late as 1600 where Christ is also beardless (*ibid.*, p. 38) and other examples of the type even in modern times (*ibid.*, p. 52).

[139]See Hartt, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, fig. 565. For other examples, see also M. Wheeler, *His Face. Images of Christ in Art*, New York: Chameleon, 1989 (e. g. the *Flagellation* by Bacchiacca, 1494–1559).

[140]See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, (1975), fig. 245, and Venturi, *Michelangelo*, plates 219–225, where the representations of Christ are all beardles

[141]Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 49.

[142]Wingless angels are common in Sta Maria Maggiore and other Early Christian sites, and not unknown in the Renaissance (see Leonardo's angel in Verocchio's *Baptism*, 1470–73, fig. 8 above). It may be argued that, in view of the inclusion of

Christ in his drawing for Vittoria Colonna[144] (which are all common features in Early Christian schemes) were likewise deliberately intended to refer back to early Christian practice, corresponding with the aims of the Catholic reformers. Such works therefore, including and especially the depiction of a beardless Apollo–type Christ, are not to be viewed as totally innovative, and even less as heretical or pagan (as has been suggested), but rather as being informed by a wish to return to the Early Christian tradition, at least as much as by the influence of pagan Apollo statues such as the *Apollo Belvedere.*

Because of the emphasis given to the depiction of Christ as an Apollonian figure, surrounded by an aura of light, it is also relevant here to refer back to previous comments on the formal analysis of the work and its divisions into areas of light and dark. As already demonstrated, light and dark contrasts are used to emphasize the inner and outer 'circles' and Christ is emphasized by the surrounding golden aura. This view should be considered in conjunction with observations on the recent cleaning and restoration of the Sistine frescoes, which have shown that the emphasis on light and colour is actually greater in Michelangelo's frescoes than had ever previously been supposed. It seems reasonable to assume that similar effects will result from the cleaning of the *Last Judgment*, begun in early 1990. At least one contemporary commented on the darkness of the lower areas of the fresco,[145] but the cleaning of the fresco may well provide additional reinforcement for the present reading of the fresco, where light and Sun–symbolism is a major concern.

In view of the links between cosmology, theology and the scene of the *Last Judgment*, which have been demonstrated, and in view of Michelangelo's depiction

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winged angels in the earlier sketches for Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling and their omission in the final scheme, the ignudi are to be read as 'wingless angels.'

[143]Although seized on by Michelangelo's critics, halo–less saints were not only common in Early Christian works, but also in the Renaissance. For example Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, 1495–98, and Raphael's *Transfiguration*, 1518–20.

[144]Compare figs. 78 and 92. See also Bainton, 'Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo,' p. 40: 'in this mode of treatment Michelangelo was returning to the styles of the earliest portrayals of the crucifixion in the fifth century...he was in line with a general tendency of the Catholic liberal reform to restore primitive Christianity.'

[145]Anton Francesco Doni, *Letter* to Michelangelo, 1543, quoted by Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 164.

of the beardless and youthful Christ in a manner related to the traditional analogy between Christ and the sun, it then appears that the fresco can be read as containing deliberate reference to theological cosmological concepts. In the light of Michelangelo's contacts with Catholic reformers, his depiction of Christ as Sun–Symbol may be reconsidered in the context of the Christian religion rather than that of classical statuary. Religious sources, the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers, lay a firm foundation for the strong tradition of Christ as a Sun–symbol. This was expressed in the iconography of Early Christian art by the transference of the cult of Sun–worship, associated with the Graeco–Roman Apollo, to the depiction of Christ. Michelangelo's beardless Apollonian Christ is thus to be viewed in terms of a deliberate allusion to the Christian analogy, not primarily as a classical Renaissance 'pagan' interpretation of the male nude.

In re–examining the fresco in the context of Christian cosmological symbolism, it is important to consider additional ways in which Christian cosmology and Christian light and Sun–symbolism were perpetuated in sources which might have relevance for Michelangelo. The popularity of the theological Sun–Christ analogy in the sixteenth century has been emphasized with reference to the prevailing theological sources, but literary, philosophical and scientific sources also exist to strengthen and support the idea that Sun–symbolism and cosmology, as related to the Christian Deity, was a major part of a well–established tradition which at that period had great significance for Michelangelo and his contemporaries. Among several literary sources popular in Italy at the time of Michelangelo which serve to demonstrate the importance and assimilation into common acceptance of the tradition of the deity as a Sun–symbol, the most important is undoubtedly the *Divina Commedia* of Dante.[146]

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[146]Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, 3 vols. (text and trans. A. Mandelbaum), New York: Bantam, 1982–86.

Chapter 6

Literary Sources

> No object of sense in all the universe is more worthy to be made the symbol of God than the sun which enlightens with the light of sense itself.
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> Dante Alighieri, *Convivio* 3, 12.[1]

i) Italian Renaissance literature

Literary sources available during the Renaissance demonstrate continuing interest in the traditional theological interpretation of Christ in terms of the sun symbol, as well as continuing interest in cosmology in general. While the tracing of similarities is not necessarily proof of literary dependence, a discussion of the type of literature available at the time of Michelangelo is necessary in order to assess the popularity and dissemination of ideas like the cosmological Sun–Deity analogy. Since space does not allow consideration of the full range of Italian Renaissance writings, a major emphasis will be placed upon the writings of Dante, long regarded as an established source for Michelangelo. Although the writings of other poets, including Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo himself, may be adduced as evidence of continued interest in Sun–symbolism and cosmology in the Renaissance, Dante's works may be used in order to clarify prevalent general beliefs about cosmology and the arrangement of the universe just before and during the Renaissance period, as well as for their relevance specifically as a source for Michelangelo. A brief examination of the *Divina Commedia* (begun c. 1307–1308) confirms Dante's wide use of an overall cosmological approach and also of Sun–symbolism, suggesting how Michelangelo's knowledge of the scriptural and Early Christian written and visual

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[1]Dante Alighieri, *The Convivio*, London: Dent, 1903, p. 203. Discussed by P. Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher. Man in the Cosmos*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

images of the Sun–Deity analogy were likely to have been reinforced by his knowledge of Dante.

ii) The *Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri

The writings of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) were amongst the most popular in Italian literature, and, during the Renaissance period, as Lightbown neatly expresses it, 'the *Divina Commedia* was a household book to the Florentines.'[2] Michelangelo is known to have been particularly well–versed in Dante's writings, as is confirmed by contemporary sources. Condivi states that Michelangelo 'especially admired Dante...whose work he knows almost entirely by heart';[3] Vasari confirms this, and comments that Michelangelo 'was especially fond of Dante whom he greatly admired, and whom he followed in his ideas and inventions.'[4] Michelangelo's interest in Dante is also confirmed by other contemporaries of Michelangelo, such as Benedetto Varchi.[5] The issue has also received emphasis in more recent, art historical discussion of Michelangelo,[6] and various works of his have been assessed as reliant on Dante for their source material, such as his *Lamentation* drawing for Vittoria Colonna and the well known figures of Charon and Minos from Dante's *Divina Commedia* which are included in the *Last Judgment* itself.[7] Apart from these

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[2]Lightbown, *Botticelli*, vol. 1, p. 151. This is also confirmed by the large number of editions of Dante's works in the two hundred years following his death, given by Brieger as well over six hundred (P. Brieger, 'Pictorial Commentaries to the *Commedia*,' in P. Brieger, M. Meiss and C. S. Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy*, 2 vols., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, vol. 1, p. 83).

[3]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 103.

[4]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) pp. 1840 and 1926; (ed. Bull) pp. 333, 422.

[5]See R. and M. Wittkower, *The Divine Michelangelo, The Florentine Academy's Homage on his Death in 1564*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1964, p. 78.

[6]For example, Wind (*Pagan Mysteries*, p. 183) speaks of Michelangelo as a 'profound expositor' of Dante; Panofsky (*Studies in Iconology*, p. 179) says that his 'scholarly knowledge of Dante was a byword.'

[7]The *Lamentation* drawing for Vittoria Colonna includes direct quotation from *Paradiso* XXIX, 91, discussed by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 60 and fig. 159 (see also *ibid.*, p. 34, for Michelangelo and Dante). For other references to Dante as influence on Michelangelo, see also De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 59f; Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, p. 164; Wilde, *Michelangelo*, pp. 39, 63, 166; Hartt, *Michelangelo*, p. 140; Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, pp. 132, 137; Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, pp. 32–33, 264–265; Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 357; and recently Barnes, *Invention*, chapter 5. Michelangelo was very much involved in the

themes, commonly emphasized as originating in Dante, other subjects treated by Michelangelo could also have been derived from this source, reinforcing the idea of Michelangelo's knowledge and use of Dante's poetry. For example, themes connected with the Julius tomb,[8] the Sistine Ceiling and the presentation drawings[9] are prominent in Dante's *Divina Commedia.* However, the major part of the discussion surrounding Dante as source material for Michelangelo has centred on the fresco of the *Last Judgment* itself.

Both Condivi and Vasari refer to Dante's *Divina Commedia* as a specific influence upon Michelangelo's *Last Judgment.* Condivi comments on the depiction of Charon, 'exactly as Dante describes him in his *Inferno.*'[10] Vasari states that in the figures of Charon and Minos Michelangelo 'was following the description given by his favourite poet Dante,' and he also refers to the *Last Judgment* when he comments 'the paintings he [Michelangelo] did were imbued with such force that he justified the words of Dante: "Dead are the dead, the living truly live." [11] Following such contemporary observation, the *Divina Commedia* (particularly the *Inferno*) has been widely recognized as a source used by Michelangelo for elements in the *Last Judgment.*

De Campos comments on the necessity for caution in claiming Dante as a

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project to bring back Dante's remains from Ravenna to Florence, and offered to construct the tomb in 1519 (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 1975, p. 179).

[8]The idea of Moses and St Paul as the two great parallel figures of the Old and New Testaments who had the unique experience of seeing God may be cited, and also Rachel and Leah as personifications of the Active and Contemplative life (*Purgatorio* XXVII, 101–108). See J. A. Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso*, New York: Greenwood, 1968, p. 89.

[9]These include that of Judith and Holofernes (*Purgatorio* XII, 59, *Paradiso* XXXII, 10) and the execution of Haman (*Purgatorio* XVII, 26), depicted in the spandrels of the Sistine Ceiling. The themes mentioned by Dante of the flaying of Marsyas by Apollo (*Paradiso* I, 13–21), and the legends of Tityos (*Inferno* XXXI, 124), Ganymede (*Purgatorio* IX, 22–30) and Phaeton (*Purgatorio* IV, 73; *Paradiso* XVII, 1f; XXXI, 124–126), all connected with the Apollo legend, are subjects which evidently held interest for Michelangelo during the 1530's, as shown by the presentation drawings, but they are seldom discussed in relation to Dante (see Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, pp. 277–278, 350–352 and 389–390: Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, pp. 133–134, 174).

[10]Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 84.

[11]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1883–1885; (ed. Bull) pp. 380–381 (referring to *Purgatorio* XII, 67).

direct source.[12] He discusses the two characters that are directly traceable to Dante (Charon and Minos, respectively *Inferno* III, 76–136 and V, 4–24) as the only certain ones, but maintains that there is a 'reminiscence' in the central circular group surrounding Christ of the Mystical Rose in Dante's *Paradiso*. He concludes: 'the influence of Dante is limited.'[13] De Tolnay also emphasizes similar isolated features and concludes: 'only the motifs of Charon and Minos seem to revert directly to Dante.' Referring to classical legend rather than to Dante himself, he views their inclusion as an expression of Michelangelo's 'fundamental paganism.'[14]

More recently, Steinberg has commented on the presence of 'Charon of pagan legend' as 'out of place,'[15] even though, as will be demonstrated, reference to Charon became a common *Last Judgment* motif in the period following Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Steinberg further examines the importance of Dante for the fresco, but he still confines his remarks, like most other commentators, largely to the debate surrounding the inclusion of Charon and Minos.[16]

Discussion has thus centred on the inclusion of Charon and Minos, but there are other highly significant aspects of Dante's great work which might be argued as influential on Michelangelo's fresco. These have so far received very little attention. Not only the *Inferno*, but also the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* may be viewed as source material for certain features of *Last Judgment* iconography in general and Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco in particular. Dante's great literary work is not

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[12]De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, pp. 59–60.

[13]*Ibid.*, pp. 63–64, 68 and 75.

[14]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 34 and p. 38, quoted above, chapter 5 section iii. Also, concerning De Campos' interpretation: 'One can hardly detect a resemblance to a rose.'

[15]Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 49. Steinberg also argues that, at the time of the painting of the *Last Judgment* (1535–41), Dante's 'authority as a teacher of Christian doctrine did not rank high' (*ibid.*, p. 53). He cites critics of the 1560's for this however, and in a later paper himself calls this into question when he maintains that in defence of the *Last Judgment* in 1549 Benedetto Varchi pointed out references to Dante as 'a way of giving it status' (Steinberg, 'Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' p. 234).

[16]Steinberg, 'Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' especially, pp. 211–237 and *idem*, 'Line of Fate,' p. 105f. The discussion concerns the pose of Charon and an alternative explanation of the Minos/Biagio da Cesena identification, linked with Steinberg's perception of the diagonal compositional emphasis in the work.

only noted for his metaphysical interpretation of the cosmological arrangement of the universe based on the perfection of the circular form, but also, significantly, for the all-pervading theme of the depiction of the Deity as symbolised by the Sun. In addition, visual interpretations of such themes in Dante's work which survive show that, in specific details as well as in the broader cosmological approach, correspondences may be discerned between Dante's writings and *Last Judgment* iconography. Dante had provided source material for the iconography of the *Last Judgment* well before the time of Michelangelo, as examinations of representations post-dating the *Divina Commedia* demonstrate.

iii) Visual images

Relevant visual material and images include not only direct illustrations of manuscript texts of the *Divina Commedia*, but also other works, such as depictions of Heaven and Hell, which were clearly influenced by Dante's writings. In the Duomo, Florence, a portrait of Dante himself has been combined with an illustration of Hell, Purgatory and the celestial spheres of Heaven, 1465, in accordance with the *Divina Commedia* (fig. 93); but, more prevalent than this type is the inclusion in versions of the *Last Judgment* itself of scenes of Heaven and Hell which relate to Dante's interpretation and show the widespread influence of Dante's writings. Meiss discusses the effect which the *Divina Commedia* might have had on *Last Judgment* iconography in Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and demonstrates the interaction between Dante's description of Hell and popular depictions of the Last Judgment.[17]

Giotto is known to have been a close friend of Dante and common ground or reciprocal influence seems evident in a consideration of the *Last Judgment* at Padua (1305). The *Last Judgment* by Nardo di Cione in the Strozzi Chapel, Sta Maria Novella, c. 1345–57 (fig. 37), includes a portrait of Dante amongst the Blessed, and

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[17]M. Meiss, 'The Smiling Pages,' in Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy*; similarities between Dante's manuscript and *Last Judgment* frescoes are discussed pp. 39–49, 61f.

the fresco of the *Inferno* on the adjacent wall (fig. 38) relates closely to his writings. This is a striking example of the effect of Dante's cosmology on the iconography of the Last Judgment, and demonstrates that it was considered in literal and physical terms, not just as a metaphysical system. The Strozzi *Judgment* draws away from tradition in placing separate scenes on different walls, and bears some relation to Dante's *Divina Commedia*, both in the episodic approach to the individual areas of Heaven and Hell and in specific details in different areas. The fourteenth–century frescoes by Traini in the Camposanto at Pisa (fig. 40) similarly relate to Dante's poem both in composition and subject matter.[18] Signorelli's inclusion of a portrait of Dante in a lower register in his series of frescoes at Orvieto, 1499–1500 (figs. 48, 49) also suggests a consciousness of the descriptions in *Inferno* and *Paradiso*. Here, the Last Judgment theme is again broken up into distinct areas. The influence of the *Divine Comedy* is thus reflected in several important versions of the *Last Judgment*, especially notable in the way some deviated from the traditional format. Reference to Dante's *Inferno* had increasingly become the norm, and totally expected and acceptable for Italian depictions of the Last Judgment in the centuries following Dante.

In addition to the influence of Dante on Last Judgment iconography in general, it is important to consider the actual form of the manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy* which were circulated with illustrative material alongside the written text. Several fourteenth– and fifteenth–century manuscript copies of the *Commedia* survive, with accompanying illustrations as well as commentaries.[19] Approximately thirty illuminated manuscripts remain which contain comprehensive illustrative schemes, serving a similar function to the commentaries, namely to elucidate the text. Another highly important set of illustrations to the *Divine Comedy* was the series of drawings (of which ninety–two survive) made by Botticelli for Lorenzo di

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[18]For Dantean influence on the *Last Judgment* by Giotto, Nardo, Traini and others, see Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 1, especially pp. 39–44 and fig. 18. See also *ibid.*, fig. 75, a detail of Vecchietta's *Last Judgment* showing a figure obviously based on Dante's Minos.

[19]Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*. See especially 'Pictorial Commentaries to the *Commedia*,' by P. Brieger, pp. 83–113.

Pierfrancesco de' Medici.[20] These were much admired and nineteen of Botticelli's drawings, engraved by Baccio Bandini, were included in the first printed edition of Dante, issued in 1481, together with a commentary by the Neoplatonist Cristoforo Landino (1424–92).[21]

As Panofsky points out, 'Nobody read Dante without a commentary' and, since Landino's *Dante* remained standard until 1544 and Michelangelo was 'no less familiar with this commentary than with the Dante itself,'[22] this edition merits special attention. It is of particular significance for the present hypothesis because of the Neoplatonic interpretation which Landino gave to Dante's text. Dante was, of course, primarily a follower of Aristotle, described by him as 'the master of the men who know' (*Inferno* IV, 131), closely followed by Socrates and Plato. Dante's writings were also very much informed by the medieval scholastics and Thomism, but, by the late fifteenth century, especially with the work of Landino, a Neoplatonic interpretation was given to the work. Indeed, Dante himself pointed out Platonic overtones and several authors have suggested that Platonism became available to the Florentines partly through the work of Dante.[23]

Landino himself was very much a part of the erudite circle attached to the House of the de' Medici, with which Michelangelo was also to become closely

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[20]See Lightbown, *Botticelli*, vol. 2, pp. 172–205, and K. Clark, *The Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divine Comedy*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976. Dante's writings had become less popular in the early fifteenth century until, at the end of that century, they were revived, mainly through the efforts of the Neoplatonist circles who lent their interpretation to the text (Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 1, p. 47; A. Chastel, *Arte e Humanismo a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Turin: Einaudi, 1964, pp. 113–136, 'Dante, l'Accademia platonicae e gli artisiti').

[21]See A. Field, 'Cristoforo Landino's First Lectures on Dante,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (1) 1986, pp. 16–49. For Landino's *Commentary on Dante* and its links with Botticelli, see Lightbown, *Botticelli*, vol. 1, pp. 56–58, 148; Clark, *Drawings by Botticelli*, pp. 8–9; E. Garin, *L'umanismo*, Bari: Laterza, 1964, p. 110f. (Eng. ed., p. 84).

[22]Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 179. See also Lightbown, *Botticelli*, p. 56.

[23]See Dante, *Letter to Can Grande*, (*Epistolae*, letter X, section 29) where he acknowledges his debt to Plato. For modern interpretation, see, for example, Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, p. 2f.; Field, 'Landino's first lectures,' pp. 37–38. As Mandelbaum points out, 'Dante is not to be called an unequivocal Thomist,' (Mandelbaum (ed.) *Divine Comedy*, vol. 1, p. xv).

associated.[24] Perhaps because of this association, in Landino's commentary 'every line of the poet is interpreted on Neoplatonic grounds,' and there is a particular emphasis on the idea (also discussed by subsequent commentators) that Dante had based some of his concepts on Plato's thought.[25] In view of Michelangelo's known interest in Neoplatonism, Landino's *Commentary* and his emphasis on the Neoplatonic content of the *Divina Commedia* is particularly significant.[26]

iv) Dante's Cosmology

In the *Divina Commedia*, Dante describes his journey as he is guided through the nine circles of Hell extending downward in a conical cavity to the centre of the earth's sphere. Emerging on the opposite hemisphere, he visits the mountain of Purgatory, then ascends, through the different celestial spheres, until he reaches the sphere of fixed stars and the Crystalline Heaven or Primum Mobile. Dante finally reaches the Empyrean where he beholds a vision of God and the angels (see diagrams, figs. 94 and 95).

Dante's *Divine Comedy* may be interpreted from a number of different angles and on various levels. It is, at the same time, a detailed 'Journey through the universe' or traveller's tale told at 'first hand' by one who had actually 'been there';

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[24]For Landino, see C. Landino, (ed. R. Cardini), *Scritti critici e teorici*, 2 vols. Rome: Bulzoni, 1976; C. Landino, *Commentary on Dante*, 1481 (Microfilm kindly supplied by the British Library); Panofsky, 'Neoplatonic Movement in Florence,' and 'Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo,' in *Studies in Iconology*, pp. 129–230; O. Morisani, 'Art Historians and Art Critics, III: Cristoforo Landino,' *Burlington Magazine*, 95, 1953, pp. 267–70; Field, 'Landino's First Lectures,' pp. 16–49. Field emphasizes the fact that no further commentary was written until the mid–sixteenth century (pp. 37–38). The relevance of Neoplatonism for the interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* will be more specifically discussed in chapter 7.

[25]See Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, p. 2. Mazzeo emphasises the existence of many Platonic notions in the *Divina Commedia*, especially chapters 1 ('The Phaedrus tradition'), 3 ('Love and Beauty') and 5 ('Plato's "Eros" and Dante's "Amore" '). Dante's access to Plato's writings differed from that of the later Florentine Neoplatonists, by which time Plato's writings were far more easily available, especially through the work of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) (to be discussed in chapter 7).

[26]Space does not allow a full discussion of Landino's *Commentary* and its relevance as source material for Michelangelo, which must remain a subject requiring further research. However, it will be considered and referred to at a number of key points.

an encyclopaedic discussion of philosophical and theological problems; a discourse on astronomy with excursions into history, mythology and even physics; a metaphysical 'Vision' of Paradise; the autobiography of a Soul; a discourse on Love; a mystic and moral allegory.[27] These various aspects have been discussed at length in the extensive literature, as also have the various sources which Dante, in his erudition, used as the basis for his great work. These include numerous classical works, especially Aristotle, Virgil and Ovid, and the writings of the Church Fathers like Pseudo–Dionysius, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas.[28] As well as these sources, as mentioned above, the presence of Platonic ideas in the work has also been discussed. As Singleton points out, the mixing of Christian and pagan sources was not incongruous: the ancient classical writers, especially Plato, were viewed, by the time of Michelangelo, as 'precursors' who had grasped the 'idea' of truth which was later to be properly revealed through Christianity.[29] Although Plato's works were not generally available at this time, with the exception of the *Timaeus*, Platonism itself was widespread, and the elements of his doctrines were diffused in Italy through other writings, especially the early Church Fathers. The main issue here, for the interpretation of the *Last Judgment*, is not so much whether Dante was in himself a Thomist, an Aristotelian or a Platonist, but the way in which he was likely to have been regarded by Michelangelo and his circle, and which aspects of his works would have been regarded as important for Michelangelo and his patrons. As shall be seen in the next chapter, on Neoplatonism, there are strong reasons to

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[27]See C. H. Grandgent, *Companion to the Divine Comedy* (as edited by C. S. Singleton), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 12–18. References to such discussions may of course be multiplied indefinitely.

[28]*Ibid.*, pp. 11–12; E. G. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics, A Study of the Divina Commedia and its relation with some of its Medieval Sources*, New York: Octagon, 1968 (1st ed. 1913), especially chapters 2 and 3, 'Dante and St Augustine' and 'Dante and Dionysius,'; E. Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1968, especially section 4.

[29]Grandgent/Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, p. 14. See also B. Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale*, Rome: Laterza, 1983, for Dante's knowledge of Aristotle in relation to other philosophies, especially pp. 142–154 ('Platonismo agostiniano e aristotelianismo'); L. Minio–Paluello, 'Dante's Reading of Aristotle,' in *The World of Dante. Essays on Dante and his Times*, (ed. C. Grayson) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 61–80.

consider a Neoplatonic approach to the reading of Dante in this context, especially in view of the enormous predominance of Landino's interpretation, which was so very popular about this time. Michelangelo knew Dante well and, in view of the Neoplatonic approach to the *Divine Comedy* established by Landino, a consideration of Neoplatonic overtones in the work seems appropriate.

Among the major themes in Dante which might be susceptible to Neoplatonic interpretation and which are relevant here are the cosmological framework of the *Divina Commedia* and the poet's use of light and Sun–symbolism, related to his expression of the Sun–Deity analogy as evolved from antiquity and linked to the Christian God. Dante's cosmology has been the subject of much attention and discussion and has recently been examined in depth by Boyde,[30] but not specifically as source material for Michelangelo. Dante's general cosmological framework for the universe, divided into Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, has been represented visually both by his contemporaries and by modern commentators (see figs. 94, 95). Precise astronomical references to the sun, moon, stars and planets have been regarded as evidence of his interest in serious scientific astronomy and cosmology, which he utilized in his attempts to explain both the metaphysical and literal arrangement of the universe. The scientific aspects of Dante's astronomy and its significance have been examined in a detailed study by Orr[31] – in both its symbolic and scientific contexts. Dante's interest in an accurate scientific approach is witnessed by numerous references to actual astronomical observations in his writings, and his view of the spherical earth in a spherical universe is significant as evidence of the waning of the flat–earth theory by the late Middle Ages.

Dante's writings clearly show that the concept of the earth as a globe was becoming acceptable by this time, and that the idea of a stationary spherical earth in a spherical universe was a view which was held by the educated classes by the

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[30]Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, especially part 1, 'The Cosmos.'

[31]M. A. Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, New York: Kennikat, 1969. See also Dreyer, *History of Astonomy*; and M. A. Peterson, 'Dante and the 3–sphere,' *American Journal of Physics*, 47 (12), 1979, pp. 1031–1035, for recent scientific study of Dante's cosmological framework.

fourteenth century (see representation, fig. 96).[32] The emphasis on the inherent perfection of a spherical system probably contributed to the interest shown in it,[33] and, at the same time, Dante also clearly accepted the existence of the antipodes, where he positions Purgatory. Thus the traditional flat–earth construction, based on scripture and the writings of men like Cosmas and Lactantius, was being increasingly questioned some time before the sphericity of the earth was confirmed by circumnavigation.[34] The idea of a spherical earth, which was known to have been considered by the ancients, was gradually moving into common acceptance. These concepts, which had been laid in abeyance by the dominance of Christian scriptural doctrine during the Middle Ages, now came under reconsideration, and the influence which the church and scriptural sources held for cosmology was evidently slackening. Yet although Dante and others conceived a spherical earth and spherical universe, the system was still imagined as having a 'top' (where the Empyrean was situated) and 'bottom,' within the depths of Hell. The increasing adjustments from the earlier strict format of the *Last Judgment* iconography in Italy from about this time (as discussed in chapter 3 above), could well be related to this questioning of the traditional cosmological formula. It has already been mentioned that Giotto, for example, had close connections with Dante, so his looser and less strictly hieratic interpretation of the *Last Judgment* could have been formed in connection with this type of questioning of the Biblical cosmological structure.

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[32]Cosmology had reverted to a form of geocentrism, based on the Ptolemaic system, with a solid, motionless spherical earth surrounded by concentric crystal spheres bearing the stars and planets. For cosmology in the time of Dante, see Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 102f.; Grandgent/Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, pp. 24–25; Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, p. 147; D. L. Sayers, *Divine Comedy*, vol. 3, *Paradiso*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, pp. 350–351.

[33]See G. Poulet, 'The Metamorphoses of the Circle,' in J. Freccero (ed.), *Dante. A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965, pp. 151–169. He notes the importance of the centre of the circle and the relationship between centre and circumference.

[34]For rejection of the flat–earth view, see above, chapter 2. For Dante's views, see also his *De Aqua et Terra*, London: Dent, 1925, section 3, where he comments: '... the centre of earth, as all admit, is the centre of the universe....' (p. 391), and even touches on gravitational pull (section 16, p. 404). He discusses variations in the views of land from the sea as evidence for the earth's sphericity (section 23, pp. 420–421). See also Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, pp. 147 and 224–5, for common acceptance of such concepts in Dante's time.

Scientifically speaking, the circular geocentric system could not account for all the movements of the planets and, in addition, this system, as utilized by Dante, contained one major philosophical stumbling block. According to Dante, the earth was situated at the centre of the universe but the circles of Heaven remained in hierarchical order of importance above and around the earth, and the circles of Hell in descending order below the earth's surface (fig. 94).[35] This approach was evidently based on the Aristotelian system of motion, according to which heavy bodies, including those metaphorically weighed down by sin, moved in a straight line down towards the centre of the universe (that is, the centre of the earth); pure, light bodies tended to move in a straight line upwards to the Heavens. Bodies of ethereal substance, like stars, planets and the heavenly spheres, were the only ones which moved not in a straight line but in perfect, circular, eternal motion.[36] Medieval astronomy was closely interlinked with magic and metaphysics as well as with religion in a way which might contrast with the twentieth–century scientific approach.[37]

Since the earth was regarded as the centre of the universe, the difficulty with this geocentric system was that, where the innermost circle of Hell is placed at the centre of the earth, then Hell is actually at the very centre of the universe.[38] The problem of a haidocentric universe which results when the flat–earth 'up for

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[35]Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, pp. 68–71, 143–144 ('The Difficulties of Geocentric Astronomy').

[36]Aristotle, *De Caelo*, II, xiv, 296a–297b (trans. W. K. C. Guthrie) London: Heinemann, Loeb, 1971, pp. 240–251. Aristotle perceived the *sphere* of the universe as having a 'top' and 'bottom' (*De Caelo*, IV, i, 307b–308a, *ibid.*, pp. 327–331. See Orr, *Dante And Early Astronomers*, p. 83). Dante's cosmology also retains the concept of movement upwards to Heaven and downwards to Hell in numerous places (e.g. *Inferno* IV, 13; *Paradiso*, XXI, 7f. and 28f.); Aristotle's theory of motion and its allegorical correspondence with metaphysical concepts is also discussed by Orr (*ibid.*, p. 324f.).

[37]Demaray relates Dante's poem to Medieval and early Renaissance cosmological concepts, comparing it with the way the Medieval cathedral is also based on the perception of God's created universe (J. G. Demaray, 'Dante and the Book of the Cosmos,' *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, (77), Part 5, 1987, especially pp. 1–3). Demaray also draws comparisons between Dante's structure of the Universe and Medieval mappa mundi and rose windows (pp. 58–59 and 99–103).

[38]Grandgent/Singleton, *Divine Comedy*, p. 110. Hell, in fact Lucifer himself, is at the centre of Dante's universe.

Heaven' and 'down for Hell' approach is juxtaposed with the known sphericity of the earth, caused some concern during the Middle Ages. Many diagrams thus place the earth in the centre of the system and omit any reference to Hell; others, like the so–called 'T–and–O' maps place Jerusalem at the centre of the earth's surface, according to Ezekiel 5:5.[39] In the *Divina Commedia*, Dante placed Jerusalem at the centre of the Northern hemisphere, although Hell remains the centre of the Earth, but he also gave serious consideration to alternative structures, including the idea that it was the earth which revolved around the sun, which he discussed, but rejected, in the *Convivio*.[40] This demonstrates a knowledge and continuing awareness of the ancient idea of the sun–centred universe in the later Medieval period and early Renaissance, long before the time of Copernicus.[41]

v) Sun–symbolism and Cosmology in Dante's *Divina Commedia*

It could therefore be argued that the influence of Dante's circular cosmology on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco is of greater significance than the various isolated features like the figures of Charon and Minos. The view of the universe as primarily based on the perfect, eternal form which is the circle is common to both. A shared source in Augustine's comments on the perfection of the circular form seems probable. An equally significant way in which Michelangelo could have used Dante's *Divina Commedia* as a source for his depiction of the Last Judgment, however, is in Dante's use of light symbolism and the analogy continually expressed between God and the sun.

Light symbolism, linked with the idea of representing the Christian God by

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[39]See S. J. Heniger, *The Cosmographical Glass. Renaissance Diagrams of the Universe*, San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1977, especially chapter 2, 'The Geocentric Universe,' pp. 31–44.

[40]Dante, *Convivio* III, chapter 5 (London: Dent, 1903, pp. 157–163). *Convivio* gives a clear account of the theories of Plato and Philolaus. Dante's rejection of the ancient speculation that it was the earth and not the skies which moved was based on Aristotle's *De Caelo* (Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, p. 164).

[41]The background to Copernicus' theory concerning the motion of the earth and the sun–centred universe, including ancient and Medieval precedent, will be fully discussed in chapter 8.

the sun, is extremely common in Dante's writings. In the *Convivio* he states plainly, 'no object of sense in all the universe is more worthy to be made the symbol of God than the sun which enlightens with the sense of itself.'[42] But it is in the *Divina Commedia* that the potency of the theme is fully developed. Landino comments on Dante's use of 'Comparisons beyond compare' ('Comparatione inconparabile')[43] and, indeed, it has even been claimed that, apart from the Gospel of St John, the *Divina Commedia* is the greatest Christian writing in which God as a metaphysical concept is represented by light – and specifically as a material symbol, the sun or a point of light.[44] Sun–symbolism in the *Divina Commedia* itself has been extensively discussed. Mazzeo, for example, traces its origins to the ancient notion of light as symbolic of Divinity as well as what he calls 'the residue of sun mythology in the Scriptures.'[45] He comments on the importance of light metaphysics in the Medieval period, through the writings of the Church Fathers, emphasizing the likelihood, here, of the influence of Plato's famous analogy between the Good and the Sun in the *Republic*.[46] Gardner also draws attention to the writings of Plato and the Neoplatonists as a source for Dante's Sun–symbolism, as well as the references to be found in the scriptures, so the writings of these authors do emphasize the Platonic reading of the *Divine Comedy*.

More recently, Boyde also comments on the extensive use of the analogy.[47] Important sources for Dante's use of light and Sun–symbolism are also traced in detail by Flanders Dunbar, who stressed Dante's use of the Sun–symbol for the

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[42] *Convivio*, 3, 12. This has important Platonic overtones, in spite of the fact that *Convivio* was so strongly influenced by Aristotle's *Ethics* and the *Commentary* of Thomas Aquinas on that text.

[43] Landino, *Commentary*, preface, p. 10.

[44] G. L. Bickersteth, *Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965.

[45] Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, p. 142f.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

[47] Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics*, pp. 82–83, traces Dante's various sources, the Bible, the Church Fathers, like Augustine and Pseudo–Dionysius, as well as the early Neoplatonists like Plotinus (c. 203–70) and Proclus (410–485), known for his commentary on *Timaeus*. See also Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, especially pp. 144–159 for Dante's obsession with the philosophical and scientific problems and pp. 203–217 for the different aspects of Dante's light and Sun–symbolism.

Christian God and also carefully traced the origins of the theme within the wider context of Medieval symbolism in general.[48] Specific sources used by Dante are discussed, which include analysis of ancient sun worship, the Early Christian concept and the continuance of the tradition in the Middle Ages through the agency of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine and Pseudo–Dionysius – much of which has been discussed (above chapter 5) in the context of Michelangelo's probable source material. Writing on Dante, Dunbar demonstrates the way in which Christianity appeared to combine its concept of the deity with the old sun gods by drawing attention to the notion of Christ as the Divine Sun, as expressed in the scriptures.[49] The continuation of the traditional use of the Sun–Deity analogy through the medium of Dante is emphasized.[50] In a recent publication, Priest[51] examines similar themes in the *Divina Commedia* in terms of the Trinitarian structure of the work and a relationship between the Sun Deity analogy and the Trinity.[52]

The important role of light and sun symbolism in Dante's work, together with its possible platonic overtones has thus already received a great deal of attention, both from the Renaissance commentator Landino as well as in modern criticism. This does not, however, seem to have been examined in relation to its

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[48]H. Flanders Dunbar, *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the Divine Comedy*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1961. See especially chapter 3, 'Symbolism in Medieval thought and its Center in the Sun,' and Appendix IV, 'Imagery of the Sun–Storm God in the New Testament.'

[49]*Ibid.*, pp. 130f and 180–182. New Testament sources for sun–symbolism given by Dunbar (pp. 257–261) are related to Dante's text as well as their Medieval continuations (pp. 437–439). Dunbar discusses the origins of Sun–symbolism in Plato's *Republic*, Book 6, and its relation to Plato's famous metaphor of the Cave, *Republic* book 7, (pp. 123, 254, 344). Dunbar also points out that, in Dante's time, the Greek word for the sun 'Helios' ('ηλιος) was thought to have derived from the Hebrew word 'Eli' for God (p. 160, n. 167).

[50]*Ibid.*, especially pp. 157–239.

[51]P. Priest, *Dante's Incarnation of the Trinity*, Ravenna: Longo, 1982. The rising sun represents Christ, the noon–day sun represents the Father and the setting sun the Holy Spirit (p. 43f.).

[52]Also, Dunbar, *Symbolism*, pp. 58, 144–148 (The relationship between God the Father and the Son is like that between the sun and its rays); J. Quillet, '"Soleil" et "Lune" chez Dante,' in *Le Soleil, La Lune et Les Etoiles au Moyen Age*, Université de Provence, Marseilles: Editions Jeanne Lafitte, 1983, pp. 327–337.

possible influence on Michelangelo's use of a Sun–symbol. Since the *Divina Commedia* represents an accepted and extremely accessible source for Michelangelo, a brief examination of Sun–symbolism as expressed in its different sections will demonstrate the way in which this literary source reinforced the traditional or Early Christian approach to the motif. The Sun–Deity provides the central imagery in the *Divina Commedia* as it does also in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. Dante's cosmology in general is dependent on this symbolism: Heaven is the source of light, heat and movement – Hell is the dark depth where Satan is frozen motionless. Actual references to sun or light symbolism in the *Divina Commedia* are far too numerous for individual discussion.[53] Such references are far more numerous in the final section, *Paradiso*, than in the *Inferno*, which is the section usually claimed as source material for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. Yet light symbolism is also evident from the very beginning of the work as a whole, since in the opening of Canto I of *Inferno* Dante describes how, astray in a dark wood, he soon found himself on a sun–clad hill, where the light from the sun could lead him.[54] From this opening point, commentators, including Landino, take the sun to represent an image of God. Manuscript illustrations of Dante's writings of the type which were popular in Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth century confirm this interpretation (fig. 97), and, conversely, the darkness of the entrance into the 'cavern of Hell' is also emphasized.[55] Light, or rather the absence of it, is noted as Dante descends into the deeper and darker inner circles of Hell – and the darkness of Hell is common in illustrated versions (fig. 98). Charon tells his passengers, 'I come to lead you to the other shore,/ to the eternal dark,' (*Inferno* III, 86–87), while Minos takes his stand

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[53]E. H. Wilkins and T. G. Bergin, (eds.), *A Concordance to the Divine Comedy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965. This lists 186 instances of the words *luce* and *lume* and 117 uses of *sol* or *sole*. The nuances of *lume* (radiated light) and *luce* (source of light) are discussed by Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, pp. 150–151, as well as associated words like *fulgor*, *rai*, *fuoco*, *lucerna*, *lampa*, etc.

[54]*Inferno* I, 1–3, 16–18. Landino compares the symbolism of Canto I to the writings of St John the Evangelist (Landino, *Commentary*, p.1). See also discussion in Dunbar, *Symbolism*, pp. 158–160.

[55]See also Brieger, Meis and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, pp. 39–46. [Titles given here to manuscript illustrations are based on Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*].

in 'a place where every light is muted' (*Inferno*, V, 28).[56] In their physical attributes, Michelangelo's depictions of Charon and Minos clearly relate to manuscript illuminations of the *Inferno* of a type with which he must have been familiar (figs. 99, 100), and also to Botticelli's drawings of the subject.[57] In other words, the personages of ancient mythology had come to be regarded as 'demons' in the Christian scheme and their inclusion, by Dante or Michelangelo, does not make the user 'pagan.'

The innermost circle of Hell, that of Judas, is described as 'the deepest and darkest place' (*Inferno* IX, 28),[58] and darkness, here, is clearly the metaphysical and symbolic antithesis of the light of God; the innermost circle is the furthest point from the light of the Saviour. In the final lines of *Inferno*, Dante's cosmology and his view of the composition of the universe is further clarified. Lucifer himself is placed in the deepest point of Hell in the very centre of the earth, the three mouths of his three–faced figure holding the three worst sinners: Brutus and Cassius, betrayers of the empire and earthly monarchy, and Judas, betrayer of the spiritual saviour.[59] This is illustrated by Botticelli's drawing (fig. 101) among others. The centre of the earth, and hence of the sphere of the universe surrounding it, is thus Lucifer himself. This is emphasized by Cristoforo Landino in his Commentary of 1481.[60]

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[56]Respectively 'i' vegno per menarvi a l'altra riva/ ne le tenebre etterne' and 'in loco d'ogne luce muto.' According to Landino, Charon's boat stands for Free Will (Commentary to *Inferno* III), discussed by Field, 'Cristoforo Landino,' p. 18.

[57]Also Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, pp. 54–57, 82–89. It is interesting to note the similarity of Michelangelo's figures of Charon and Minos with the standard depictions of the figure (Compare Clark, *Botticelli's Drawings*, p. 34, Charon). As in Michelangelo's version, a snake–like appendage is often substitued for Minos' tail, in the manner of the punishment accorded to thieves (*Inferno* XXV, 95, 'their head and tail right through the loins'). Cf. Steinberg's discussion, ('Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' pp. 229, 235–237).

[58]'l piu basso e 'l piu oscuro/ e 'l piu lontan dal ciel che tuto gira.' Landino draws attention, here, to the structure of the circle and how its central point must be the furthest point from the circumference (Quello e piu basso locho. Se l'inferno scende infino alcentro della terra: e questo cerchio e el piu basso conviene che lui sia nel centro: e perche ogni centro e la piu lontana parte che sia dalla circumferentia pero e piu lontano da cieli,' – Landino, *Commentary, Inferno* IX).

[59]*Inferno* XXXIV, 38–67. For Dante's political theory concerning secular rule and kingship, see Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* in *The Latin Works of Dante*, London: Dent, 1925, pp. 127–280.

[60]Landino writes: 'nella piu bassa parte del mondo laquale e el centro d[illegible] terra'

Where Dante's view of the universe as a reflection of current concepts is concerned, it is interesting to consider this view of the central point of the universe, since Dante then goes on to pin down this point even more specifically. With Virgil, his guide, he continues the descent down Lucifer's body until they reach 'the point at which the thigh/revolves, just at the swelling of the hip' (*Inferno* XXXIV, 76–77).[61] At this point they become 'reversed,' as, now climbing upwards, they begin to make their way out towards Purgatory, in the southern hemisphere, as seen at the bottom of Botticelli's drawing (fig. 101). The precise point chosen by Dante for the very centre of the universe is thus the middle of Satan's body, and Botticelli's drawing for this particular Canto clearly places the centre of Satan's body in a circle, with the figures of Dante and Virgil in descent/ascent. An early manuscript of the *Divina Commedia* adheres even more closely to Dante's text in placing the centre of the universe more specifically at Satan's thigh. In the fifteenth-century version in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence (fig. 102), the point on Satan's thigh has clearly been used by the artist as the pivotal centre for the point of the pair of compasses in drawing of circle of the universe. In view of the fact that the navel or groin were conventionally chosen as the mid oint of the body (as in Vitruvian man), it seems strange that no explanation for Dante's choice of the thigh seems to have been put forward in the Dante literature.[62]

In his analysis of the innermost circle, Singleton explains how, along with the light/dark contrast between Good and Evil, Heaven and Hell, the figure of Lucifer

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which is 'puncto indivisibile ....' ('in the deepest part of the world which is the centre of the earth.... a point indivisible....' *Commentary* on *Inferno* XXXIV). See also C. S. Singleton, *Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, vol. 2, Commentary, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971. Singleton comments on the way in which Dante and Virgil start to turn at Satan's thigh, 'i. e. at the exact center of Satan's body, also at the exact center of the earth and of the Universe in the Ptolemaic system' (p. 633).

[61]'là dove la coscia/ si volge, a punto in sul grosso de l'anche...' See illustrative material in Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illustrated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, figs. 319, 320.

[62]The *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (vol. 2, p. 230) lists other references in Dante to 'coscia' but does not discuss the choice in *Inferno* XXXIV, nor, for example, does D. Provenzal, *Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia*, 3 vols., Venice: Mondadori, 1980. It does seem to require some Biblical exegesis.

in Hell is presented as the antithesis of the Christian God.[63] Dante's Satan is presented as an allegory, 'the image of sin, the principle of evil, the negative counterpart of God, who is the principle of good. As the Godhead comprises three persons...so Lucifer is pictured three-faced.'[64] In view of Dante's extensive use of Revelations as a source,[65] it seems highly possible that the choice of Satan's thigh is used as the obvious antithesis of Christ's thigh which, according to Revelations 19:16, bore the inscription 'King of Kings and Lords of Lords' – and thus stands for Christ as both the temporal and spiritual ruler of the universe.[66] While Christ's thigh symbolises all that is good in the universe, the devil's thigh represents the absolute and final antithesis of this – the absolute nadir.

Sun-symbolism continues to receive emphasis in the second part of the *Divina Commedia* as Dante visits Purgatory. Here, too, the light symbolism is emphasized with an increased number of specific references to the Sun-Deity analogy, as the symbol of the sun appears in its main function as the symbol of God. A distinction is made between the elements of the Trinity as the rising sun is used as an image of Christ (*Purgatorio* I, 107 and II, 1–9).[67] The analogy is continued throughout that section, as God as the sun is used as a symbol for all that is best

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[63]Grandgent/Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, p. 110.

[64]*Ibid.*, pp. 110–111. The three aspects which in the Trinity represent Power, Wisdom and Love, here represent Hate, Ignorance and Impotence in the Devil; the six wings of Lucifer correspond to the 'beasts' at God's throne in Revelations 4:8. Mandelbaum also states that Satan's three faces are 'a grotesque counterversion of the three Persons of the Trinity' (Mandelbaum, *Divine Comedy*, vol. 1, p. 393). Also Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, pp. 70–71.

[65]References to the book of Revelations (believed to be by the same author as St. John's Gospel) are numerous in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, for example, in *Inferno* I, 100 and 117; XV, 99. Numerous precise comparisons are discussed in Grangent/Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, *passim*, and Mandelbaum, *Divine Comedy*, notes to the 3 vols., *passim*.

[66]'And he hath...on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS.' This verse in the Bible is followed by a reference to the Sun-symbol (v. 17). Dante's concern with the secular and spiritual aspects of rule, which are suggested by this verse, are demonstrated in *Purgatorio* XVI, 106 and *Monarchia*. Singleton identifies several precise references to Revelations 19 in the *Divina Commedia* (*Purgatorio* XXX, 15; *Purgatorio* XXXII, 75 and *Paradiso* XXIV, 2), which indicate Dante's likely familiarity with it. The direct relevance for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* of Dante's cosmological use of thigh symbolism will become clear in chapter 9.

[67]Priest, *Dante's Incarnation*, chapter 5, especially p. 124f.

and desirable (for example, *Purgatorio* IV, 16; VII, 26 and XII, 74).[68] In *Purgatorio* XIII, 13–21, the metaphor is extended as Virgil (Dante's guide) prays directly to the sun for guidance (*Purgatorio* XIII, 13–21).[69] The Sun–Deity analogy is further developed as the sun moves round to the west when it starts to set (*Purgatorio* XV, 4–12),[70] contrasting with the appearance of the sun as it rises in the eastern sky (*Purgatorio* XXX, 22–27).[71] A direct confrontation occurs as the procession turns to face the sun (*Purgatorio* XXXII, 17) and Dante compares this with the moment of Christ's Transfiguration (70–84).[72] The section concludes after the sun has reached noon, directly overhead (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, 103–105). As a symbol of God and the illumination of Divine Knowledge, it is appropriate for it to appear at its brightest at this point, just before Dante prepares to leave Purgatory and climb upwards to the stars (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, 145, see fig. 103).[73]

In the third and final section of the *Divina Commedia*, the *Paradiso*, the analogy between sun and Deity is given its fullest expression. Here Dante describes his journey through the different celestial spheres, including the sphere of the sun, until he reaches the Empyrean where he experiences his vision of Heaven. According to Landino's Neoplatonic interpretation, which was so popular in Michelangelo's time, Dante's journey serves as a metaphor for Platonic ideals of man's striving in order to reach the good and happy life,[74] and, in view of Michelangelo's interest in

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[68]'l'alto Sol che tu disiri/ e che fu tardi per me conosciuto,' (VII, 26).

[69]Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, pp. 147–148.

[70]See Priest, *Dante's Incarnation*, pp. 138–141.

[71]*Ibid.*, p. 161f.

[72]See note by Mandelbaum, *Divine Comedy*, vol. 2, p. 401.

[73]See Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illustrated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, fig. 422c.

[74]Platonic notions are discussed by Landino in his Preface to his Commentary on Dante. In the section entitled 'Furore Divino,' he refers to sources used by Dante: Pythagoras, Empedocles, Heraclitus and Plato who, like Hermes Trismegistus before, had discussed concepts like wisdom, justice, harmony, the nature of the divine and the human soul ('...finalmente el divino Platone. Questi, come prima avea scritto T[r]imegisto, affermavono che l'animi nostri, innanzi che ne' corpi discendano, contemplano in Dio come in suo specchio la sapienza, la iustizia, l'armonia e la belleza della divina natura...' (Landino, *Commentary*, preface, p. 9) Landino also included in his publication a letter from Marsilio Ficino, whom he calls 'el nostro platonico.' (For modern transcription of introductory passages to Landino's Commentary, see Cardini, *Scritti*, pp. 97–164, especially, 143–144 and

Platonism (to be further discussed in the next chapter), such an interpretation of Dante would reinforce the likelihood of Michelangelo's use of the *Paradiso* as source material.

The primary function of the Sun–symbol in *Paradiso* is as the symbol of God, and not only as the source of everything (Knowledge, Wisdom and Goodness), but as the means by which such things are communicated or illuminated to man.[75] As potential source material for Michelangelo, it is important to consider, once more, not only Dante's written text where the sun is used as a symbol of the Deity, but also the visual material in the form of illustrated Dante manuscripts of a type which were likely to have been familiar to the artist.

Paradiso, the last section of the *Divina Commedia*, opens with a reference to light symbolism which Landino emphasizes by showing how, like the light of the sun, the glory of God penetrates the universe.[76] *Paradiso* I, 13f. continues with a reference to Apollo, the classical sun god. Dante pleads for inspiration from Apollo,[77] and specific references to the sun as Deity and to light symbolism in general are numerous in the early cantos (*Paradiso* I, 47, 79f; II, 32–36, 80; III, 1–3). The importance of sun and light symbolism is also conveyed by the illustrative material (for example, fig. 104), as well as by the discussions of contemporary and later commentators.[78] Of particular importance are Cantos X–XIII where Dante's visit to

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153–155 for references to Plato). Ficino's interest in Sun–symbolism will be discussed below, chapter 7.

[75]See Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, p. 145f. ('He is both Divinity itself and the source of the 'light' which mediates the mind and the object of its knowledge') and Priest, *Dante's Incarnation*, chapter 6, '*Paradiso*,' pp. 167–216.

[76]'La gloria di colui che tutto move per l'universo penetra....' cf. Landino, *Commentary* on *Paradiso* I.

[77]He refers to the legend of the flaying of Marsyas (*Paradiso* I, 13–21), regarded as of interest to Michelangelo in his use of the flayed skin bearing a self–portrait in the *Last Judgment*, and his reference to similar themes in his poems (C. Gilbert, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of Michelangelo*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, nos. 150 and 159). The popularity of the Marsyas legend among the Neoplatonists, as referring to the flaying as an ordeal of purification to release the spirit from the flesh, is discussed by Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, pp. 142–147. Raphael also treated the subject of Marsyas on the ceiling of the Stanza della Segnatura. His adjacent *Parnassus* and *Disputa* both contain portraits of Dante.

[78]For additional illustrative material for these cantos, see Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, figs. 425a, 426, 432a. The Sun Deity

the 'Heaven of the Sun' is described. In the 'sphere of the Sun,' Dante distinguishes between the actual sun and the spiritual sun. The visible sun corresponds to Christ, the Incarnate form of the Godhead, whilst God, the immaterial sun is not yet visible.[79] Later illustrations to these Cantos, especially the version by Giovanni di Paolo which circulated in fifteenth–century Florence, also show this interpretation as an overriding theme, because it seems to be a reference to the use of an actual 'sun' (fig. 104) and not purely an artistic convention for the depiction of light.[80]

As has already been discussed, the main problem attached to Dante's system was the haidocentric nature attained by the spherical system when it was combined with the traditional concept of Heaven above and Hell beneath the earth's surface. Dante himself seems to have been conscious of this problem (of the spheres of the universe in rotation with Hell as their centre), which he attempted to overcome by including the notion of a separate circular motion in the celestial areas. In Canto XXI, amongst several references to the sun, he introduces the idea of a specific 'Point of light' in the Empyrean around which the Heavens revolve and round which the celestial spirits move in perfect, eternal, circular motion:

> And I had yet to reach the final word
> when that light made a pivot of its midpoint
> and spun around as would a swift millstone.[81]

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analogy is particularly emphasized in *Paradiso* V, 133–139; IX, 8; X, 41–54; XII, 15, 51; XV, 76; XIX, 4–6.

[79]Especially *Paradiso* X, 52–54. See Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, p. 144; Priest, *Dante's Incarnation*, pp. 138, 155; J. Freccero, '*Paradiso X.* The Dance of the Stars,' *Dante Studies*, (86) 1968, pp. 85–112.

[80]For other examples see Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, figs. 446a, 453b and 456 to 465 for illustrations to the 'sphere of the sun' where the sun symbol is quite clearly shown in all major examples. The example of Giovanni di Paolo is particularly important because of his known interest in astronomy (L. S. Dixon, 'Giovanni di Paolo's Cosmology,' *Art Bulletin*, 67 (4) Dec. 1985, pp. 604–613).

[81]Canto XXI, 79–81 ('Né venni prima a l'ultima parola,/ che del suo mezzo fece il lume centro,/ girando sé come veloce mola;'). The movement of the celestial spirits in perfect, circular motion (around Dante) is already mentioned at X, 64–65, but the image of God as a specific point of light as the central pivot for circular motion in the Empyrean is emphasized from this section of Canto XXI, where the analogies of sun, light, circular movement and central point are combined. Peterson ('Dante and the 3–sphere,' pp. 1033–1034) discusses the scientific connotations of the introduction of the central 'Point' in the Empyrean as opposed to the central point

From the following Canto (XXII), when Dante leaves the planets to move on to the sphere of the 'Fixed Stars,' references to light and Sun–symbolism are significantly increased, far outweighing those in the central sections. Light, the sun and circular motion are stressed as Dante travels within the sphere of Stars – and beyond, towards the Empyrean. The sun analogy is combined with the idea of the point of light as the centre of the circular composition of the Heavens, and motion around the central point is emphasized. This concept seems to bear reference to Augustine's discussion on the symbolism of the circle and the significance of its central point which generates the form, discussed in chapter 5.

Canto XXIII, 1–9 of *Paradiso* opens with the Sun–symbol and then describes the sunrise in the form of a metaphor of Christ:

> I saw a sun above a thousand lamps;
> it kindled all of them as does our sun
> kindle the sights above us here on earth;
> and through its living light the glowing Substance
> appeared to me with such intensity –
> my vision lacked the power to sustain it.[82]

This description, in which the sun is used as a symbol of the Deity itself, may be compared with Michelangelo's vision of the *Last Judgment* and his depiction of the Sun–Christ in the centre of a circular composition (figs 1, 52, 53), especially in view of the fact that Dante had acknowledged his own sources for these concepts in Plato.[83] A correspondence between Michelangelo's fresco and Dante's text seems remarkable when the scene is described where Christ 'glows' over all which is 'beneath Christ's

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in Hell.

[82] *Paradiso* XXIII, 28–33 ('vid' i' sopra migliaia di lucerne/ un sol che tutte quante l'accendea,/ come fa 'l nostro le viste superne;/ e per la vive luce trasparea/ la lucente sustanza tanto chiara/ nel viso mio, che non la sostenea.'). Compare *Purgatorio* XXX, 22–32.

[83] See Dante's *Epistolae*, especially Letter X, which is his letter to his patron Can Grande and, in effect, his own commentary on the *Divina Commedia*. He writes: '...for we see many things by the intellect for which there are no vocal signs, of which Plato gives sufficient hint in his books by having recourse to metaphors, for he saw many things by intellectual light which he could not express in direct speech,' (section 29).

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rays' (*Paradiso* XXIII, 72 – 'sotto i raggi di Cristo'), 'under a ray of sun that streams/ down from a broken cloud,' (*Paradiso* XXIII, 79–80).[84] The use of Sun–symbol for the Deity is here combined with the cosmological concept of eternal circular motion, as Dante describes the spirits revolving in a circle or 'crown' around the Deity as a sun or central point of light (*Paradiso* XXIII, 95, see fig. 105).[85] This is also amply illustrated by Botticelli's drawing to Canto XXIII (fig. 106) where the Sun–Christ symbol is clearly positioned in the centre of the circular orbits (figs. 107, 108) in a visual representation of Dante's transcendental realm of the Empyrean.[86]

Botticelli's drawing for Canto XXIV, 9–12 of *Paradiso*, which refers to the revolving circular movement of the joyful heavenly spirits as well as to light symbolism, again illustrates a circular movement around the central Sun–Christ, and this is similar to the movement of the spirits around Christ in Michelangelo's fresco. Botticelli's subsequent drawings for Cantos XXIV–XXVI all retain the same emphasis (figs. 106–108).[87]

In Dante's sphere of the Fixed Stars, the revolving spirits are analogized to the stars in the Platonic sense,[88] and it is at this point that Dante clearly states his ultimate belief that it is God who sets the heavenly spheres movement in motion:

> ...I believe in one God – sole
>
> eternal – He who, motionless, moves all

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[84]At this point, Landino describes Christ directly as the 'True Sun' ('Christo vera sole,' – Landino, *Commentary*, *Paradiso* XXIII). See also Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, pp. 148–149. The naturalistic overtones of Dante's description of the sun's rays can be appreciated, see fig. 130.

[85]Compare *Paradiso* XXXI, 71. A correspondence with Michelangelo's fresco is suggested since Condivi describes the blessed in the fresco as forming 'a circle or *crown* in the clouds of the sky around the Son of God,' (Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 84). Dante's circles of Souls are discussed by Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, p. 155–158.

[86]Clark *Botticelli's Drawings*, p. 200. It is interesting to note here that Botticelli's circles are drawn in perspective, as ellipses, which may be compared with Michelangelo's rendering of the 'inner circle' in his fresco.

[87]*Ibid.*, pp. 200–207; see also Lightbown, *Botticelli*, vol. 2, p. 203 (figs. E103, E104, E105).

[88]Compare *Paradiso* IV, 22f. and 49f., where the origins of this notion in *Timaeus* are considered.

the heavens with His love and love for Him.[89]

The idea is repeated when Dante reaches the Primum Mobile, the last and swiftest sphere of Heaven, beyond which lies only the Empyrean. The mind of God here sets in motion the whole universe:

> The nature of the universe, which holds
> the centre still and moves all else around it,
> begins here as if from its turning–post...
> As in a circle, light and love enclose it
> as it surrounds the rest...[90]

Themes expressed here, such as God represented by light as the central point and motivating force of the entire circular system, correlate well with Michelangelo's fresco. The perception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as a huge revolving formation, set in motion by the gesture of Christ, which is so different from preceding examples of the subject, could well be linked with Dante's description of the circling heavens. It appears highly probable that Dante's concept of the circling motion of the heavens, as expressed in *Paradiso*, thus had some measure of influence upon the overall composition of Michelangelo's fresco. Dante's image here of the 'Point' which acts like the hub or pivot of a wheel, causing the revolving, turning movement, is reminiscent of discussions on the concept of the Medieval 'Wheel of Fortune.'[91] It does therefore seem that, in the circular arrangement of the saved around Christ, Dante's cosmological arrangement of spirits circling the Godhead demands equally serious consideration as a source.[92]

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[89]*Paradiso* XXIV, 130–132, ('Io credo in uno Dio/ solo ed etterno, che tutto 'l ciel move,/ non moto, con amore e con disio'). This cosmology relates, of course, to Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover' (for which see Aristotle, *De Caelo*, ed. Guthrie, p. xviff.).

[90]*Paradiso* XXVII, 106–114 ('La natura del mondo, che quieta/ il mezzo e tutto l'altro intorno move,/ quinci comincia come da sua meta;.... Luce e amor d'un cerchio lui comprende,/ si come questo li altri...). See Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*, p. 159f., for further discussion.

[91]See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 48–49 and figs. 278–281, De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 89, and Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 49. Dante also refers to the Wheel metaphor at *Paradiso* XXVIII, 22–26.

[92]For further discussion of the 'Wheel of Fortune' (based on Ezekiel 1:16 and 10:2 and Pseudo–Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, 15, 9) as source for Dante see

Visual images of Dante's analogy between sun and Deity in the centre of a circular, cosmological scheme were reflected in several manuscripts of the *Divina Commedia*, showing an established tradition, some time before Michelangelo. In particular, the manuscript by Giovanni di Paolo (fig. 109), with Christ in the centre of a sun–aureole is an excellent demonstration of this concept. The gesture of Christ's right arm here is another example of the use of a type which relates to the form used by Michelangelo for his figure of Christ. It may further be compared with the prominent figure in Botticelli's drawing for Canto XXVII, which utilizes an almost identical gesture to that of the Christ of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (fig. 110, compare fig. 109).

The idea of the Heavens as concentric circles of light, revolving around a point of light of infinite intensity demonstrates Dante's key distinction between the revolving spheres of the material universe and the transcendental realm of the Empyrean. The idea is further developed as, in Canto XXVIII, the important concept of the 'Point' is combined with the analogy, previously expressed, between the sun and the Deity.[93] These ideas are also demonstrated by Giovanni di Paolo's illustration to this Canto (fig. 109).[94] Dante's vision culminates in his description of the Point, read by commentators as well as artists as the sun:

> I saw a point that sent forth so acute
> a light, that anyone who faced the force
> with which it blazed would have to shut his eyes...[95]

Grandgent/Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, p. 458–459; Demaray, *Dante*, p. 99f.

[93]Landino relates the light symbolism of Canto XXVIII to Biblical sources, specifically the creation of light in Genesis ('Fiat lux et facta est.'). God is the highest light from which comes all other ('Somma luce dalla quale nace ognaltra luce'), Landino, *Commentary*, canto XXXIII.

[94]See Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, p. 506. Giovanni di Paolo provides a rare precedent for Christ beardless in a *Last Judgment* scene (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, fig. 270). For Giovanni's cosmology, see Dixon, 'Giovanni di Paolo,' pp. 604–613, showing interaction between Biblical views and Renaissance observation.

[95]*Paradiso* XXVIII, 16–18: 'un punto vidi che raggiava lume/ acuto si, che 'l viso ch'elli affoca/ chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume;'. The point is the centre and source of everything. For discussion, see Grandgent/Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, pp. 287, 301 and Singleton, *Divine Comedy*, vol. 3, *Paradiso*, pp. 448–451. (U. Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1989,

The true significance of the 'Point of Light' seen by Dante is explained by Beatrice:

> ...'On Yonder Point
> depend the heavens and the whole of nature.
> Look at the circle that is nearest it
> and know: its revolutions are so swift
> because of burning love that urges it.'[96]

and she describes (from l. 98) the different circles which revolve around this central 'Point' in the Heavens (cf. l. 126).[97] Dante does not, of course, specify that the central point of light which is the pivot of the circular scheme of the heavens is the sun itself in a pre–Copernican way. But visual interpretations by artists like Botticelli and Giovanni di Paolo did read Dante's 'Point' as equivalent to the sun. Christ is clearly viewed as this 'central point' of the celestial heavens in Dante's system and He is thus positioned, 'indivisible and eternal,' and analogized with the sun, at the central point of both Dante's vision and of the rotating circular composition of Michelangelo's huge fresco. Christ forms the focus upon which the composition and all else is dependent (figs. 1, 52 and 53).

In the remainder of Dante's epic, Christ is again referred to in conjunction with the sun and light symbolism and the Point of light is emphasized as the central pivot around which the Celestial orbs rotate in contrast to the central position of the earth in the terrestrial system.[98] Dante's use of the Point of light as the centre of

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passim, also discusses the concept of the idea of 'the Only Fixed Point in the universe, eternally unmoving,' p. 5).

[96]*Paradiso* XXVIII, 41–45: 'Da quel punto/ depende il cielo e tutto la natura./ Mira quel cerchio che piu li è congiunto;/ e sappi che 'l suo muovere è si tosto/ per l'affocato amore ond' elli è punto.' Thus where the centre of the terrestrial universe is earth (as discussed above), the centre of the celestial universe is God.

[97]See Singleton, *The Divine Comedy*, vol. 3, *Paradiso*, pp. 449–450. Sources are traced to Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072 – 'Ex tali igitur dependet caelum et natura'). See also Mandelbaum *Paradiso*, n. for lines 41–42 on p. 411, and Gardner, *Dante and the Mystice*, p. 347. Mazzeo (*Structure and Thought*, p. 171) views the concept of the universe as deriving from a single outpouring 'radiation' of light in Neoplatonic terms.

[98]Especially *Paradiso* XXIX, 99, 136 and 145, and Landino uses this passage to emphasize the idea of Christ as sun–symbol showing how the sun grew dark at Jesus' Passion ('Sole obscuro nella passione di Christo,' *Commentary*, Canto XXIX). *Paradiso* XXX, 11 contains further reference to the Point of dazzling light.

his transcendental celestial system cannot be conflated with the later heliocentric theory in scientific terms, but, because of his extremely precise astronomical references in his work,[99] the view of the rotation of the Heavens around a focus other than the earth could suggest that Dante was ahead of his time in considering alternative systems of cosmology. Dante's variations on the Aristotelian system in his introduction of two separate but related schemes for the celestial and terrestrial regions, as well as his awareness of the proposed idea that the universe was actually sun–centred, have already been mentioned above.

The existence of the one specific central Point is a major theme in the last three Cantos alongside the emphasis on the Sun–Deity analogy. This is referred to again in the form of pure light (*Paradiso* XXX, 46–54), the river of light (*Paradiso* XXX, 61–69) and the radiance of God (*Paradiso* XXX, 97–114). A circle of light is filled with human souls (XXX, 103f) and this idea is closely related to Dante's famous vision of the Celestial Rose, described in Cantos XXX – XXXII.[100] Illustrations of this concept from contemporary manuscripts demonstrate the emphasis on a cosmic circular design around the Sun–symbol (fig. 111).[101]

Dante concludes his whole work when a sudden flash of Heavenly inspiration completes his vision, and he attains for one instant full understanding of the meaning of the Incarnation and the perfect union of the Human and Divine in Christ. Christ as Sun is finally perceived as the centre point of the Empyrean and of the circular celestial universe. Dante understood, at last, 'like a wheel rolling uniformly/ ...the Love that moves the sun and the other stars' (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 144–145),[102] and this format, as Singleton explains, is dependent upon the concept

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[99]B. Andriani, *Aspetti della Scienza in Dante*, Firenze: Felice le Monnier, 1981, especially section I, 'L'astronomia.'

[100]For discussion of the Celestial rose, see B. Seward, *The Symbolic Rose*, New York: Columbia, 1960.

[101]Brieger, Meiss and Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, figs. 506–520. Even much later interpretations, by artists like William Blake (1757–1827) and Gustave Doré (1832–1883), read Dante in the same way (see *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. 1, pp. 642–643 and vol. 2, fig. opposite p. 592; M. Klonsky, *Blake's Dante. The Complete Illustrations to the Divine Comedy*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980, plates 94 and 101).

[102]'si come rota ch'igualmente è mossa, l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.'

that 'The circle, being the perfect figure, is the emblem of perfection; and circular motion symbolizes full and faultless activity.'[103] Dante evidently adhered to the traditional idea of the moving sun and stationary earth, astronomically speaking, yet his view of the Deity as a personified sun, situated in the centre of the Heavens with all else revolving and propelled by its forces, is an overriding theme in the latter part of his *Divina Commedia*. Dante's ultimate vision and perception of the Trinitarian Godhead in the universe, depicted in a fifteenth-century Florentine illustration to Canto XXXIII as three interlocking circles (fig. 112), incidentally seems to form the foundation of the symbol which Michelangelo used for his mason's logo.[104]

Even though Dante was an Aristotelian and a geocentrist, certain ideas recur over and over again in his writings — the analogy between the Deity and the sun, the eternal circular motion of Paradise, the rays which extend towards man and, finally, the importance of the point in the heavens as the pivot of the celestial universe (as opposed to the role of Hell at the centre of the earth) — all these images do show a marked correspondence with features perceived in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. The above discussion of Dante's *Divina Commedia* demonstrates the significant roles which the Christian religious notions of sun and light symbolism held for its author, and the immense popularity of Dante's writings bears witness to the continuance of such a tradition and similar interests amongst a wide section of the population during the Italian Renaissance including Michelangelo himself. Dante's *Divina Commedia*, particularly the last Cantos of the *Paradiso*, may clearly be viewed as important source material for Michelangelo's circular design of the *Last Judgment* around the central Sun–Christ. To argue that Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is a simultaneous depiction of all three sections of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (*Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*), might be overextending the case, but the fresco does seem to be suffused with broader Dantean concepts. It seems

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[103]Grandgent/ Singleton, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, p. 302.

[104]For which see L. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo, Paintings, Sculptures, Architecture*, London: Phaidon, 1975 ed., cover; Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 284.

reasonable also to assume that the artist would have considered visual images of his favourite text, thus both Dante's writing itself and the type of images which became usual in illustrated versions could have contributed to Michelangelo's concept of the *Last Judgment* and his vision of Christ in Glory.

vi) Other literary sources. Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna

Dante's *Divina Commedia* thus reinforced for Michelangelo both a cosmological approach and also the traditional Christian analogy between Christ and the sun. In addition to its inclusion in Dante's writings, this type of symbolism was often repeated in Italian Renaissance literature, and references to the sun, in particular, also permeate much poetry and literature of this period. Although Dante has been claimed as a major literary source of the theme accessible to Michelangelo, the theme was not unique to Dante. Rather than attempting to examine the literature of the period in full, emphasis will be laid on works likely to have been known to Michelangelo – or already accepted as related source material for the artist – especially the poems of Vittoria Colonna and the artist himself.

The works of Petrarch (1304–1374), for example, are less often proposed as a source for Michelangelo, [105] but he, too, frequently refers to the sun in his poetry and uses it in a metaphorical sense which has religious connotations.[106] Closer to Michelangelo's own time, references to cosmological ideas, and specifically the sun, are to be found in the work of several important Italian Renaissance poets which might be attributed to the influence of Dante reinforcing the original Christian association.[107] Probably closer of access to Michelangelo are references to the sun in the poetry of the patron of his youth, Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492). Here, the use

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[105]Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, especially p. 8 (where Michelangelo's probable reading material is listed) and pp. 319–325.

[106]J. Tusiani, *Italian Poets of the Renaissance*, Long Island City: Baroque Press, 1971, pp. 4, 6, 13, 23.

[107]Such as Matteo Boiardo (1441–1494); Girolamo Benivieni (1453–1542); Iacopo Sannazaro (c. 1455–1530) and Serafino Aquilano (1463–1500), for which see Tusiani, *Italian Poets*, pp. 57–61, 89, 105 and 110, respectively. For very 'popular' use of sun imagery in sensuous Renaissance poetry ('much of which is designated unquotable') see Dunbar, *Symbolism*, pp. 426–427.

of the Sun–symbol possesses more directly theological implications since Lorenzo, for example, laments that 'the sun is spent' in his poem 'To Jesus Dead.'[108] Michelangelo's one time tutor, the Neoplatonist Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494) included use of the Sun–metaphor in his poetry,[109] and, another great influence in Michelangelo's early years, Fra Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), also made use of the Sun–Deity metaphor in his poetry as well as in his famous sermons. Christ is described in Savonarola's *Triumphus Crucis*, 'above His head ... a light like a sun, with three faces in the form of the Holy Trinity.'[110]

Arguably the greatest Italian epic poem after Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) was first published in 1516 and references to the sun here are numerous.[111] Astronomical questions are raised as Ariosto discusses the concept of the sun standing still, which is particularly noteworthy in view of Ariosto's friendship with Celio Calcagnini (1479–1541), famous for scientific writings on this topic, whom he mentions specifically by name.[112] Metaphorical references to the sun are also included in the work of several other lesser sixteenth–century Italian poets demonstrating the enormous extent of solar references in the literature of the period and confirming the prevalence of the concept, which in all probability owed much to the seminal work of Dante.[113]

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[108]Tusiani, *Italian Poets*, pp. 66–67 and 76–77. See also N. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1935, pp. 100f., 135f. 159. The influence of Dante and the revival of a 'Dante cult' amongst the Neoplatonists is noted, as well as the recurrence of the familiar idea of the Deity as sun.

[109]Tusiani, *Italian Poets*, pp. 98–103.

[110]For Savonarola as a poet, see Tusiani, *Italian Poets*, pp. 78–81; see also McAuliffe, *Vittoria Colonna*, pp. 161–162.

[111]Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. G. Waldman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. Symbolic meaning is clear, for example, pp. 61, 148, 406, 416–418. References to the popular myths of Phaeton (p. 24), Ganymede (p. 35), Charon (p. 498), and Minos (p. 322) also occur. Ariosto's use of Sun–symbolism is discussed by Dunbar, *Symbolism*, p. 426.

[112]Ariosto, *Orlando*, pp. 384 (concerning Joshua), 507, 511 (describing a sorceress who could 'arrest the sun, set the earth in motion'), and p. 558 for Calcagnini, whose contribution will be discussed in chapter 8 below, 'Scientific sources.'

[113]Among the poets discussed by Tusiani (Tusiani, *Italian Poets*, *passim*), works by Francesco Maria Molza (1489–1544), Luigi Alamanni (1495–1556), Francesco Berni (1497–1535), Giovanni Guidiccioni (1500–41), Giovanni della Casa (1503–1566), Annibal Caro (1507–1566), Angelo di Costanzo (1507–91), Luigi Tansillo (1510–1560) and Galeazzo di Tarsia (1520–1553) all refer to the sun metaphorically

Apart from poetic works, the concept of cosmic symbolism permeates other types of secular writing of the Renaissance, such as the books on art and architecture by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72),[114] which has already been mentioned in chapter 2. Even Castiglione's immensely popular *Il Cortegiano* (1528) refers to similar concepts, since he too discusses 'the fabric of the Universe,' and he uses the direct metaphor: 'just as in the heavens the sun ... exhibit[s] to the world, as if in a mirror, a certain likeness of God...'. He concludes with a description of Divine Goodness '...pouring itself over all created things like the rays of the sun.'[115] However, these literary sources, although available to Michelangelo, have not all generally been regarded as major influences upon the artist. They serve merely to illustrate the pervasiveness of Renaissance Sun–symbolism,[116] and it is clearly important to consider other literary works which are more directly linked to the artist. Amongst the *Spirituali* and those involved with the reform of the Catholic Church, with whom Michelangelo was associated, a number of leading figures became known for their poetry and literary works as much as for their theological discourses. The traditional symbolic association between sun and deity expressed in theological works, discussed in chapter 5 above, may be seen to spill over into the literary component of certain of the reformers' works. For example, Pietro Bembo

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in one way or another, demonstrating the common interest and concern with the natural phenomenon and what it might symbolise. Even as late as 1594, the important poet Torquato Tasso (1544–1595) began his theogony *Il mondo creato* with an address to the Trinity as 'triplicata Sole' (T. Tasso, *The Creation of the World*, trans. J. Tusiani, New York: Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance studies, 1982, from p. 3); and Tommaso Campanella's utopia, *City of the Sun* was based on similar symbolism in 1602 (T. Campanella, *La Città del Sole, The City of the Sun, a Political Dialogue*, trans. D. Donno, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) [The continuation of the tradition into the seventeenth century in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is dealt with by R. B. Waddington, 'Here comes the Son,' *Modern Philology*, 79 (3) 1982, pp. 256–266].

[114]Especially *De Re Aedificatora*, book 7, chapter 4. See Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, pp. 13, 23 and 115. Wittkower notes the cosmic symbolism of Alberti's designs and comments on the way in which the symbolism of the circle, rooted in Neoplatonism 'had an almost magical power over these men' (p. 19).

[115]Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (trans. G. Bull), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980, pp. 299 and 409. Discussed by E. Garin, *Italian Humanism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965, p. 119.

[116]See also Université Libre de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil à la Renaissance*, Colloque International, Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1963.

(1470–1547), created Cardinal by Pope Paul III in 1539, also enjoyed a wide reputation as a literary authority and was noted for his classical erudition. His sonnet, 'When the sun leaves us,' demonstrates the inclusion of the notion of the Sun–symbol in the religious poetry of the era.[117] More important for Michelangelo is the prevalence of Sun–metaphor in the writings of Vittoria Colonna, who is here to be considered as poet, as much as theologian.

Sun imagery plays a major part in the poetry of Vittoria Colonna. In a recent study, McAuliffe has shown how the image of the sun is first used in mystic reference to her husband, following his death in 1525.[118] This image is then transferred to Christ in Colonna's later 'Spiritual Sonnets,' as she expresses the well known concept of the Deity as light or the sun itself. Speaking of salvation and mercy, she invokes 'the sun who shares his rays among us...let us pray to him.'[119] She develops the metaphor of Christ, 'the true sun' (il vero sole)[120] and also often uses the image of the phoenix or rising sun.[121] In Colonna's important work, *The Triumph of the Cross of Christ* (published 1539), the influence of Dante seems apparent since it is written in *terza rima* in imitation of the *Divina Commedia* and it describes how the spirit of her deceased spouse leads her to a vision of Christ.[122] Christ is described triumphant, giving light to the sun, and McAuliffe here proposes Savonarola's *Triumphus Crucis*, cited above, as the immediate source of inspiration for this work.[123]

Bainton also refers to Vittoria Colonna's use of the Sun–metaphor for Christ, in the course of his paper on Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna. He links the

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[117]Tusiani, *Italian Poets*, pp. 116–118.

[118]McAuliffe, *Vittoria Colonna*, pp. 75–76, 79. See also A. Lawley, *Vittoria Colonna*, London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1898, for views of the poetess in general.

[119]'Se 'l sole che i raggi fra noi comparte ... preghiamo lui' (sonnet 18), quoted by McAuliffe, *Vittoria Colonna*, p. 106.

[120]*Ibid.*, p. 109. Man must 'close his heart to shadow and open it to the pure ray which transforms him in God.' See also *ibid.*, p. 119, 'the dawn of the true sun.' References to light symbolism in general are numerous in the *Rime*, see *ibid.*, pp. 114–116, 118.

[121]McAuliffe, *Vittoria Colonna*, pp. 158–159.

[122]*Ibid.*, p. 160f.

[123]*Ibid.*, pp. 161–163. McAuliffe also notes Colonna's links with Ariosto (p. 87), Castiglione (p. 47) and Cardinal Bembo (p. 45).

concept with the Catholic reformers' attempt to return to the simple obedience of the early Christians, based on the scriptures, and shows how the idea of restoring the simple and sincere forms of Christianity is reflected in several of Vittoria Colonna's works. Bainton examines her famous sonnet *The Cross* (undated), where she describes Christ in direct terms of the Sun–Deity analogy, 'He is the sun whose brilliance blinds our eyes,' which could well be taken as descriptive of Christ in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment.*[124]

Finally we come to Michelangelo and consideration of the literary works of the artist himself, as important perhaps as his art works for an understanding of his troubled soul–searching. Examination of Michelangelo's poetry reveals some interest in cosmological concepts, as well as a wealth of light and Sun–imagery which is at once evident. The artist's interest in cosmological concepts like the universe, creation, time and eternity is confirmed by many of his literary works. For example, the sonnet 'Colui che fece, e non di cosa alcuna,' dated to about 1535–41, discusses concepts of time, the creation of the universe and the creation of sun and moon.[125] Michelangelo's description here of the creation 'not from any matter' and 'Time which did not exist prior to man' demonstrates an awareness of complex theological and cosmological problems, as discussed, for example, by St Augustine.[126]

In several of the earlier poems, the traditional cosmological concept of ascent

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[124]Bainton, 'Vittoria Colonna,' pp. 35–41, especially p. 38. See also *idem*, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*, Minneapolis: Augsberg, 1971.

[125]See C. Gilbert, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of Michelangelo*, (ed. R. N. Linscott), New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, no. 102. For the original Italian, in the absence of Girardi's classic edition, see Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Rime*, (ed. G. Testori), Milan: Rizzoli, 1975, no. 104. [Note: since both these editions base their numbering and dating on Girardi, with two minor exceptions, the numbering basically corresponds with a difference of two, and the English and Italian references to the poems will henceforward be given thus: 'G' for Gilbert and 'T' for Testori as in G102/T104].

[126]See Augustine, *City of God*, Book 11, chapters 4 to 7, where he discusses such concepts as the eternity of time and the infinity of space. Augustine contemplates God's reasons for the creation and concludes that 'the beginning of the world and the beginning of time are the same (chapter 6). Concern with 'the beginning' and 'the end' appears to be reflected in Michelangelo's *Creation* fresco on the ceiling, taken in conjunction with the adjacent *Last Judgment* on the end wall of the Sistine Chapel. [Modern Science continues to attempt explanation of these concepts, S. Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*, London: Fontana, 1987].

to Heaven/ descent to Hell is implied, as when Michelangelo speaks, for example, of his body which 'rises up divine to Heaven.'[127] Elsewhere, however, Michelangelo clearly refers to the spherical universe: 'over the earth ... / from one to the other pole they search,' (1534).[128] The spiritual contemplation of the afterlife of the soul is often combined with astronomical features, as expressed in the Neoplatonic concept of souls as stars: 'the soul, released goes to its star.'[129] References to stars and moon are frequent but references to the sun itself are even more common, and its use as a symbol may be related to the use of light symbolism in general in Michelangelo's poems. Light symbolism is frequently used by Michelangelo with the same type of religious or spiritual connotations as have already been demonstrated, namely as an image for concepts of the light of understanding, knowledge, goodness or truth. For example, light symbolism is very evident in several earlier poems written in connection with the creation panels on the Sistine ceiling (1508–12)[130] and is also a major theme in several poems written about the time Michelangelo was working on the tombs for the Medici chapel (1521–1533). The day/night symbolism of the tomb sculptures has been discussed by De Tolnay, and similar themes occur in several sonnets of the 1530's.[131] Elsewhere, light symbolism is used to represent the loved one,[132] but the specific analogy with the 'light of Heaven' is also a strong theme,[133] and in a late poem Michelangelo significantly uses light symbolism in discussion of the afterlife, 'the promised great light.'[134]

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[127]For example, G105/T107; G132/T134; G152/T154; G186/T188.

[128]G66 (l. 41)/ T68: 'sopra la terra/ ... totto l'uno e l'altro polo.'

[129]G119/T121 ('l spirto sciolto/ ritorna alla suo stella), see also G 127/T129; G253/T255, and discussion, Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, pp. 197–199. In G68/T70 the stars evidently signify 'fate.'

[130]See Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, pp. 91–96.

[131]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 3, pp. 68–75. For example G100/T102. Also J. A. Symonds, *Michelangelo's Sonnets*, nos. 41–43, 50, 53 and T14 (a fragment not included in Gilbert). For further discussion see Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, pp. 93–104.

[132]G28/T30; G32/T34; G74/T76;G256/T258.

[133]G93/T95 ('celeste lume'); G127/T129; G271/T273, concerning 'the only Mover...His face and power...a guide and a light.' Cf. Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, p. 285.

[134]G293/T295 ('tanto lume altrui prometta').

Apart from Michelangelo's use of light symbolism in general, the sun itself is frequently contemplated in a metaphorical sense, and is specifically referred to in at least thirty–six of Michelangelo's poems.[135] The metaphorical references to the sun vary in type, since it is sometimes used to symbolise Time,[136] sometimes the loved one, often Cavalieri or Colonna,[137] or the world or universe in general.[138] An unusual use is in an early work, where Michelangelo refers to Pope Julius as the sun, and uses the metaphor to indicate their relationship: 'I am to you as the sun's rays are his.'[139]

The sun is frequently referred to, however, in Michelangelo's poems in a more theological metaphorical sense and used to suggest highly spiritual meaning. An early reference to the way in which the poet is left weeping 'when the sun has stripped his rays from earth,' has spiritual overtones and the idea of 'the sun's sun, quenched by death' seems to refer to the death of Christ.[140] The poet often expresses a wish 'to return to the light of the sun' or a 'yearning for the sun...to get to Heaven.'[141] Sun metaphor in G79 and G85 could easily be understood as referring to Christ with spiritual overtones, as also in G87. The metaphor is used here in highly symbolic sense and it appears to be significant that the majority of these are dated, by Testori following Girardi, to the period of the *Last Judgment*. In rather later works, comments like, 'the sun can make of my dark night bright day' suggest the spiritual

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[135]References to the majority of these will be included in the notes immediately following.

[136]For example G70/T72 (the sun in its track signifies the passage of time); G84/T86 (referring to the passage of time on the death of his father); G201/T203, G206/T208, G216/T218 (referring to the death of Bracci); also G259/T261 and G273/T275.

[137]For example: G38/T40 and G106/T108, to an unknown lady. A large group dated by Girardi to the 1530's (G59/T61, G70/T72; G73/T75, G78/T80, G79/T81, G85/T87) are usually assumed to refer to Michelangelo's idolization of the youthful Cavalieri, but references like 'the sole sun' and 'the sun of your light' could equally well be addressed to Christ at this period. The spirtuality is intense. G99/T101 seems to be addressed to Febo di Poggio, owing to the pun on Phoebus/sun. G176/T178 similarly addresses another unknown. G227/T229 seems to refer to Colonna as 'sun,' whilst G247/T249 draws analogy with the city of Florence.

[138]For example G1/T1; G19/T21; G41/T43; G52/T54; G65/T67; G218/T220; G250/T252.

[139]G6/T6.

[140]G2/T4 and G45/T47.

[141]Respectively G50/T52 and G66/T68.

power and strength of the sun, as also do metaphorical associations of the sun 'driving out shadow,' and its great heat. The idea of 'the sun playing its glittering game' is strongly suggestive of the manipulative power of the Deity.[142]

In Michelangelo's poems, cosmological phenomena, especially the sun, are infused with implicit spiritual and theological meaning in a very similar way to that expressed by Dante.[143] The sun is referred to as the source of life and the means of lighting up the poet's wretched state. Thus the spiritual meaning of the sun and its affinity with the Deity are reflected in the poems in a way that appears relevant to an understanding of Michelangelo's interpretation of the symbolic Sun–Christ in the *Last Judgment.*

The influence of Dante's poetry on Michelangelo has been widely discussed and Michelangelo actually wrote two sonnets addressed to, or in honour of Dante.[144] Michelangelo's 'addiction to the theme of the flaming sun' has been commented upon by Clements in his important discussion of Michelangelo's poetic works. Clements examines poems of Michelangelo which involve the sun, moon and stars in the context of Michelangelo's 'nature poetry,' but he also demonstrates the poet's symbolic use of these themes.[145]

The analogy between Christ and the sun, as conveyed by Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco is thus not to be regarded as an entirely innovative and revolutionary concept in its religious context, nor simply as a reference to a classical deity, in spite of His presentation as a beardless, muscular semi–nude figure. The identification between Christ and the sun was part of a very well–established tradition, fo. ıded on the ancient scriptural sources, but reinforced by Medieval and

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[142]Respectively G102/T104; G314/T316; G318/T320; G101/T103.

[143]Michelangelo's interest in the symbolism of the Sun/Apollo theme was also recorded in a letter dated 26th July 1543, where an associate of the artist recorded a conversation and discussion on this subject, shortly after the completion of the *Last Judgment* (cited by Summers, *Language of Art*, pp. 12–13). Michelangelo'- understanding of the central importance of the sun (literally as well as figuratively) is indicated.

[144]Namely G246/T248 and G248/T250.

[145]Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, chapter 5, relevant to the *Last Judgment* and p. 285.

Renaissance theological exegesis. It was a popular concept in Italian Renaissance literature, to the point of being virtually 'unavoidable.' Together with concept of the perfect, eternal and circular universe, based during the Renaissance on Augustine and Dante, Sun–symbolism was evidently well known to Michelangelo and his contemporaries. It appears probable, therefore, that such widely held and linked concepts could have influenced Michelangelo in the formation of his interpretation of the *Last Judgment.*

Strong evidence exists for the interest in the Christian analogy between Christ and the sun at the time of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* – evidence which is based firmly upon the scriptural sources, theological sources like writings of Church Fathers and the work of Catholic reformers like Valdés, as well as literary figures like Dante. The concept of Sun–symbolism and the accent on cosmological discussion was immensely widespread owing to these theological and literary sources, but another realm of influence which served to reinforce these concepts in the Renaissance (and which has already been touched on in this chapter to a certain extent) was the Renaissance revival of the ancient philosophical tradition of Plato.

Chapter 7

Philosophical Sources

> But in the sixth book on the *Republic*, that divine man [Plato] explains the whole thing and he says that the light of the intellect for understanding all things is the same God Himself by whom all things are made, and he compares the sun and God to each other.
>
> Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium.*[1]

i) Florentine Neoplatonism

The Renaissance revival of Neoplatonism was probably the major intellectual feature of the age – as Panofsky expresses it, 'Florentine Neoplatonism achieved a success comparable only to that of psychoanalysis in our own day.'[2] Based on the revival of the works of Plato (428–348 B. C.),[3] the movement attempted to demonstrate the basic unity and shared ground of two major elements of Western thought, the Judaeo–Christian religion and classical Greek thought.[4] With their centre in Florence, under the patronage of the

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[1]M. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* (transl. with introduction and notes by S. Jayne) Dallas: Spring, 1985, Speech 6, chapter 13, p. 134 (this edition henceforward referred to as: Ficino, *De Amore*). For the Latin original (which reads 'In sexto autem *De Republica* libro, divinus ille vir totam rem aperit, dicitque lumen esse mentis ad intelligenda omnia, eundem ipsum Deum, a quo facta sunt omnia. Solem namque et Deum ita invicem comparat...'), see Jayne's earlier text and translation of the work: S. Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, Columbia: University of Missouri, 1944, p. 96 (Henceforward: Ficino, *Commentary on Symposium*, ed. Jayne, 1944).

[2]E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, p. 187. See similar comment by Robb in N. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1935, p. 180.

[3]For succinct commentary on Plato and his works, see especially W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, vols. 4 and 5; and R. Shorey, *What Plato Said*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1933.

[4]See Robb, *Neoplatonism*, especially chapter 3; and R. Shorey, *Platonism Ancient and Modern*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938. See also J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1990, part I, 'Florence,' part II, 'Rome,' but especially part IV chapters 1–3 on Ficino; (This work became available too late for extensive reference in this thesis).

Medici, Neoplatonists like Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499),[5] Cristoforo Landino (1424–92), Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) (see fig. 113) exerted deep and lasting influence on European thought.[6] Among these, Marsilio Ficino was a major force in the movement and 'the philosophical mouthpiece of the Renaissance'; translator of Plato and head of the Platonic Academy of Florence, 'He was their centre and they were the centre of the Renaissance.'[7]

For Ficino and others, Plato's writings held the key to major philosophical questions of the age, subjects of perennial and topical interest – knowledge of the divine or 'Good,' knowledge of Love and Beauty, the creation of the universe, the immortal spirit or soul of man and his role in the universe. In his pre–occupation with man and the universe, Ficino's writings reflect a deep interest in cosmological speculation, and in this way may provide another major source for the cosmological interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. Plato's views concerning the cosmological ordering of the universe, which are of course closely related to his famous concept of the Good (*Ἀγαθόν*),[8] are fully discussed by

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[5]For biographical details of Ficino, see especially P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (trans. V. Conant), New York: Columbia University Press, 1943, reprinted Gloucester Mass., 1964, chapter 2 (The Italian version, *idem*, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, Florence: Sansoni, 1953, contains more original language quotations from Ficino). Also G. Saitta, *La filosofia del Umanesimo*, Bologna: Fiammenghi e Nanni, 1954 (especially chapters 1 and 2), and, recently, Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, (trans.) *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 4 vols. London: Shepheard–Walwyn, 1975–88, vol. 1, pp. 21–24.

[6]For short biographies of Pico della Mirandola, Poliziano, Landino and other major Neoplatonists, see J. R. Hale (ed.) *A Concise Encyclopaedia of the Italian Renaissance*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1981, and relevant entries in A. B. Fallico and H. Shapiro (eds.), *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, *The Italian Philosophers, Selected Readings from Petrarch to Bruno*, New York: Modern Library, 1967.

[7]Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 266, and *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 20. For Ficino's importance, see also P. O. Kristeller, 'Renaissance Platonism' in *Facets of The Renaissance*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, pp. 103–123; *idem*, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1965, chapter 3, and *idem*, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts, collected essays*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, especially p. 71f. See also R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, Paris: Belles Lettres, 1958, 'Renaissance et Platonisme,' pp. 31–49.

[8]For succinct explanation of Plato's concept of the Good, see Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 503–521: Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 230f. It is important to remember that Ficino's *Commentaries* and translations of Plato were

Ficino in his translations and commentaries on Plato. More importantly, Plato's use here of the metaphor of the Sun for the Good is also discussed and developed by Ficino, and Plato is clearly recognized by Ficino as a major ultimate source for that concept. Examination of the Christian Neoplatonic interpretation of classical philosophy will thus serve to reinforce the traditional Christian analogy between Sun and Deity as discussed above, chapters 4 and 5. It is important to remember, however, in discussion of the Renaissance revival of classical texts, that the continuous aim of writers like Ficino was to bring the Platonic view of the universe into line with Christian thinking and reconcile classical thought and Christian doctrine in a single system. Ficino and his circle were undoubtedly convinced Christians and he was himself ordained priest in 1473. Plato's doctrines, regarded at this time as the nearest of the ancient philosophies to Christian thinking and the Gospels, thus came to be viewed as actually precursory to Christianity, thereby giving validity to classical philosophy previously rejected as pagan. True religion, Christianity, was to be combined with true philosophy – namely the Greek philosophy of Plato.[9]

While there are many facets to Ficino's Christian Neoplatonism, a major theme in his writings, as in Plato's own writings, is that of cosmology, and strongly incorporated into this theme is Ficino's use of the metaphor of the sun, which was interpreted as virtually a literal correspondence between the sun and the deity. Many specific parallels with Christianity were emphasized by Ficino and other Renaissance Platonists who aimed at the integration of Christian and classical themes: the story of the Creation, the great questions of death and immortality or, more specifically, the equating of the Christian God and the

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influenced by his study of the earlier Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus and Proclus (already mentioned in chapter 5); he also tends to treat Plato's writings selectively.

[9]Kristeller emphasizes the Christian nature of Renaissance Neoplatonism, demonstrating its agreement with Christian thought (Kristeller, *Ficino*, especially pp. 24–29, 320–323; *idem*, *Facets*, pp. 105 and 110–111). See also E. Garin, *Italian Humanism, Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1965, pp. 9–11, 'Humanism and Platonism.' The legitimacy of Plato as a source for Christian wisdom was also emphasized at the time by Erasmus, especially in his *Enchiridion* (see Nieto, *Valdés*, pp. 96–97).

Platonic One or *Nous*.[10] As Cassirer succinctly expresses it, Neoplatonism represented a Christianizing of paganism, not a paganizing of the Christian religion. In spite of the classical revival and an added interest in the pagan gods, Neoplatonism was not neopaganism.[11]

ii) Michelangelo and Neoplatonism

Michelangelo is known to have been well-acquainted with the Neoplatonism of Ficino and his circle, for the household of the de' Medici, where Michelangelo spent his formative years, was the very centre of the Neoplatonic movement in Italy.[12] The tradition continued under Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92) as it had done with his grandfather Cosimo (1389–1464), the original sponsor of Ficino.[13] It is also significant for the present discussion that the two papal patrons of Michelangelo's commission of the *Last Judgment* had the same formative educational background as Michelangelo, for both the papal patrons of the fresco, Clement VII de' Medici[14] and Paul III Farnese, grew up in the household of Lorenzo the Magnificent and there absorbed the doctrines of Neoplatonism.[15]

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[10]For further discussion and parallels (like Plato's reference to the just, crucified man, *Republic* 362A), see P. Shorey, *Platonism Ancient and Modern*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938, especially chapter 3, 'Plato and Christianity'; R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages*, London: Warburg Institute, 1939; and Robb, *Neoplatonism*, pp. 22–23. Of course, such parallels had already been drawn by the earlier Platonists, such as Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, Iamblicus and also Augustine, but it is the Christian nature of Renaissance Neoplatonism which is the main concern here.

[11]E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, New York: Barnes, 1963, p. 68; *idem*, 'Ficino's Place,' p. 491. Seznec, *Revival of the Pagan Gods*, *passim*, shows how Christian philosophers could be involved with the Olympian gods but still remain faithful to monotheism.

[12]For Michelangelo's stay there, and the direct influence of men like Poliziano (Politian), see Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) pp. 1836–38; (ed. Bull) p. 331, and Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, pp. 14–15, 93 and 105.

[13]Robb, *Neoplatonism*, chapter 4, 'The Medici Circle,'; C. Hibbert, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, parts 1 & 2; A. Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'Art*, Geneva: Droz, 1954, pp. 7–22.

[14]Clement VII was the orphaned nephew of Lorenzo the Magnificent. He was the illegitimate son of Lorenzo's brother, killed in the Pazzi conspiracy, 1478 (Hibbert, *Medici*, p. 144).

[15]For the early years of Alessandro Farnese, later Pope Paul III, see Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 331f. See also Appendix II below for dating.

The enormous influence of Neoplatonism on artists and writers in the late fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century in Italy should not be underestimated.[16] In the realm of painting especially, men like Sandro Botticelli, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and even Dürer are well known for their inclusion or depiction of Neoplatonic themes in their works.[17] This was also extended to architecture, since, as Wittkower points out, the revival of the circular form in architecture was rooted in Platonic ideas.[18] However, because of the extent of his involvement in the doctrine, even in comparison with these artists, Michelangelo stands alone. The influence of Neoplatonic ideas on Michelangelo's art – in his poetry as well as his figurative work – has already been extensively dealt with in the literature and 'almost unanimously acknowledged in modern scholarship.'[19] Neoplatonic influences have been determined especially in Michelangelo's earlier works, and particularly in the sculptural schemes for the Julius tomb and the Medici Chapel, by writers like Wilde and De Tolnay.[20] Edgar Wind examines

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[16]For the influence of Neoplatonism on art during the Italian Renaissance, see, for example, Robb, *Neoplatonism*, chapter 7, 'Neoplatonism and the Arts,'; Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'Art*; P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; E. Panofsky, 'The Neoplatonic Movement in Florence and North Italy,' in *Studies in Iconology; Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972 (1st ed. 1939), pp. 129–170; Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*; Blunt, *Artistic Theory*; E. H. Gombrich, '*Icones Symbolicae*: The Visual Image in Neoplatonic Thought,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11, 1948, pp. 163–192, reprinted with additions in *idem*, *Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance II*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1985, pp. 123–196.

[17]For Neoplatonism in Botticelli's works, see E. H. Gombrich, 'Botticelli's mythologies; A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of his Circle,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 8, 1945, pp. 7–60 (reprinted in Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, pp. 31–81), also Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, chapters 7 and 8; for Raphael (notable for his portrait of Plato in the *School of Athens*), *ibid.*, chapter 11; for Leonardo da Vinci, K. Clark, *Leonardo, An Account of his Development as an Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 186–188; for Dürer, E. Panofsky, R. Klibansky and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

[18]Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, especially pp. 9–19, 23–25. He quotes the examples of Filarete, Bramante, Sangallo and Leonardo.

[19]E. Panofsky, 'The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo,' in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972 (1st ed. 1939), pp. 171–230, especially pp. 178–79.

[20]Wilde, *Six Lectures*, chapter 4 on the Julius Tomb, chapter 5 on the Medici chapel and pp. 58–63. See also De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, especially vol. 3, pp. 62, 68–75 on the Medici Chapel, and vol. 4, p. 23 on the Julius Tomb.

Michelangelo's involvement with Neoplatonic philosophy in his *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*,[21] and the influence of the doctrine on Michelangelo's theory of art and in his poetry has been dealt with by writers like Blunt, Clements, Summers and Robb.[22] Suffice it to quote from Panofsky:

> ...among all his contemporaries Michelangelo was the only one who adopted neoplatonism not in certain aspects but in its entirety and not as a convincing philosophical system, let alone a fashion of the day, but as a metaphysical justification of his own self.[23]

Amongst the various interpretations of Neoplatonic themes in Michelangelo's work, certain major aspects of Neoplatonic influence have repeatedly been discussed. More strongly emphasized perhaps than any other is the Neoplatonic attitude towards Love and Ideal Beauty which has received much comment in connection with Michelangelo's art and poetry. Dependent on related themes of Goodness and Truth, and based on Plato's dialogues, especially *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, the basic idea is one of divine love as the goal of human desire. Love of man is seen as a way to the Love of God,[24] and the combining of Platonic influence with the idea of Christian love in the works of Ficino demonstrates a harmony and affinity between the two.[25] The revival of the

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[21]Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, especially chapter 12.

[22]See Blunt *Artistic Theory*, pp. 58–81; Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, chapter 12, pp. 228–237; Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, pp. 11–17; N. A. Robb, *Neoplatonism*, pp. 225–229, 239–269.

[23]Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 180; see also E. Panofsky, *Idea. A Concept in Art Theory*, New York: Harper and Row, 1968 (1st ed. 1924), pp. 45–68, 113–126.

[24]For discussion of themes connected with Neoplatonic concepts of Love and Beauty in Michelangelo's work, see especially Panofsky, 'Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo;' De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, especially vols. 3 and 4; Summers and Clements, as in n. 22; Garin in Salmi (ed.) *Michelangelo*, pp. 517–530; and E. Balaz, 'Michelangelo's *Victory*,' *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 118, 1989, pp. 67–80. The sophisticated concepts of Platonic Love, the intense spiritual awareness of ideal youth, or the bonds between master and pupil are discussed by Plato in *Symposium*, and are far removed from certain modern psychoanalytic discussion of Michelangelo's friendships with young men (e.g. Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, pp. 294–307). For further understanding of Plato's writings on such subjects see Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, especially vols. 4 and 5.

[25]For Ficino's theory of Love, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 110–115, 263–69, 276–288, and, more especially Ficino, *De Amore*, speeches 1–3, 7, which will be further discussed in detail below.

Platonic ideals of Love and idealised Beauty added an impetus to the new conception of art in the Renaissance.[26]

Other important Neoplatonic themes which have received emphasis in iconological interpretations of Michelangelo's works include the Neoplatonic idea of hierarchy and ascent to God, or the World–Soul, according to which each being occupies its place according to its degree of perfection, from God and the angels to the lower levels.[27] This concept is often related to the sculptural schemes for the Julius tomb and the Medici Chapel. De Tolnay in particular interprets these schemes as symbolising the cosmic hierarchy and as an image of the Neoplatonic Universe and he relates them to Plato's *Phaedo* and *Symposium*.[28] Linked to the idea of the ascent of the soul was the Neoplatonic discussion concerning the relative merits of the Contemplative or Active life. Again, this has been related to Michelangelo's funerary schemes. Another major Neoplatonic theme, that of the question of the Immortality of the Soul has also been much discussed in relation to Michelangelo's works and has been understood as expressed particularly in the *Slaves* of the sculptural scheme of the Julius tomb, as well as the Medici Chapel.[29] The important Platonic discussions about death and the concept of the Immortality of the Soul, expounded by Plato in *Phaedo* were developed by Ficino

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[26]J. A. Devereux, 'The Object of Love in Ficino's Philosophy,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 30, 1969, pp. 161–170.

[27]Discussed by Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 74–91; Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, pp. 142–147.

[28]See especially De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 3, pp. 61–75, and vol. 4, pp. 24–25 and 74–75; Von Einem, *Michelangelo*, pp. 109–110. Einem comments on difficulties attached to the use of a Neoplatonic theme for a Christian chapel. He finds it unlikely that the ecclesiastical patrons would have agreed – yet these were the Medici, Leo X and Cardinal Giulio (later Clement VII), respectively the son and nephew (adopted son) of Lorenzo the Magnificent, whose tomb the scheme embraced.

[29]See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 3, pp. 61–75 and vol. 4, pp. 24–25 and 74–75; also Wilde, *Six Lectures*, chapter 4. These schemes are viewed as images of the progress of the soul from the earthly to the heavenly life and as a condensed representation of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the universe – a reflection of Plato's worlds of spirit and matter. The view of the body as the mortal prison and Plato's emphasis on wisdom over bodily pleasure, as expressed in *Phaedo* may be perceived not only in Michelangelo's works, but also in his austere way of life.

in his *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animorum* (1469–74).[30] The theme of death, especially the way in which the mortal flesh is shed at that time in order to release the spirit, is also one which is referred to by Michelangelo in his poems.[31] The doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul was officially pronounced dogma of the Catholic Church after the Lateran Council in 1512, partly as the result of Ficino's influence,[32] and the opening address of the council by Egidio da Viterbo confirms the prevailing attitude towards the Neoplatonic definition of death as the separation of Soul from Body. It is important to remember that this same man has been proposed as the theologian behind the program of Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling.[33]

Much discussion of Neoplatonism in Michelangelo's works thus exists, and it has been largely accepted as an important influence, yet, as shown, it is frequently confined to isolated ideas, or the overall Platonic concept of Love and the idea of Beauty. In addition, such discussion is also usually confined to the discovery of Neoplatonic influences in Michelangelo's earlier works, and seems to have been largely discounted after the increase of his religious motivation from

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[30]See Marsilius Ficinus, *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animorum*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1975 (reprint of 1559 ed.). See also J. L. Burroughs, 'Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 5, 1944, pp. 227–239 (for extracts). Ficino's *Platonic Theology* borrowed a great deal, including its title, from the work of Proclus, for which see Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne* (text and trans. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink), Paris: Belles Lettres, 1968–1974, especially livre 2, pp. 43–50, 'L'analogie du soleil dans le *République*.' For the influence of the earlier Neoplatonists, Plotinus (third century) and Proclus (fifth century), on Ficino, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 26f.

[31]Gilbert, nos. 31, 49, 92, 103, 150, 159, 265. Compare Dante, *Purgatorio* II, 122.

[32]See Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 324–350. For further discussion of the doctrine, see C. H. Moore, *Ancient Beliefs in the Immortality of the Soul with some Account of their Influence on later Views*, New York: Cooper, 1963, where the influence of Plato, Plotinus and Proclus is stressed, as well as the Gospel of John (3:6f.) and the Church Fathers (Pseudo–Dionysius and Augustine); also O. Cullman et al. *Immortality and Resurrection. Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought*, New York: Macmillan, 1965, and J. A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body. A Study of the Biblical Data*, Michigan: Eerdman, 1964. These works discuss contrasts and points of contact between the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Flesh and the Greek notion of the Immortality of the Soul, which both appear relevant in the context of the *Last Judgment*.

[33]Dotson, 'Augustinian Interpretation.' For Giles [Egidio] of Viterbo, see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 113 and n. 34 in chapter 5 above. Calvin's comments on the influence of Plato on religious thinking in the mid–sixteenth century confirm the notion (Eire, 'Calvin and Nicodemism,' p. 67).

the 1530's.[34] The emphasis of scholarship is laid firmly on the expression in Michelangelo's works of those Neoplatonic ideas discussed above, but several themes of major importance in Neoplatonic philosophy, and their possible relationship to Michelangelo's choice of iconography, have yet to receive sufficient attention. Neoplatonic cosmology has been discussed briefly in relation to Michelangelo's important funerary schemes but has not been considered, together with its corollary of the Sun–Deity analogy, in connection with the *Last Judgment* fresco.

iii) Neoplatonic themes

Time and Creation, the ordering of the universe, its uniqueness, its Maker, its Soul, its manner of movement and its geometric basis, and the Nature and role of Man in the universe – the finding of answers to these timeless questions forms a major preoccupation of Plato's Socratic dialogues.[35] Similarly, during the Renaissance, the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato's key works like *Timaeus*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*,[36] placed a strong emphasis on cosmology and related questions concerning the ordering of the universe. Plato's idea of the sun as a symbol of the deity (*Republic* 6), his concept of the world–soul as related to the immortality of the human soul, and the flesh–spirit dichotomy (*Phaedo*), and the symbolic significance of the circularity and circular motion of the universe (*Timaeus*) all received attention, particularly from Ficino. These major themes may also be traced as meaningful in Michelangelo's works,

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[34]A few authors even maintain that Neoplatonic influence on Michelangelo is minimal. See for example, L. D. Ettlinger in *Encylopedia of Italian Renaissance Art* (ed. Hale), who states that there is no Neoplatonic influence in the Medici chapel and 'it is imbued with a devout Christian spirit,' as if the two areas of influence were incompatible. Also Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' p. 88.

[35]For discussion of Plato's cosmology, see especially F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology. The 'Timaeus' of Plato.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1937; Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, vols. 4 and 5. Of course such references could be multiplied indefinitely.

[36]Emphasis will be laid, in this study, on these key works of Plato and, where possible, Neoplatonic translations and commentaries on these. Text and translations of Plato's works from the 'Loeb' editions will be utilized.

and, in the fresco of the Last Judgment in particular where tradition required a cosmological interpretation, the influence of Neoplatonic cosmology may be argued. The relationship between the Christian standpoint on these issues and the classical view (influenced by Platonic philosophy) may also be considered with respect to the *Last Judgment* fresco.

The writings of Ficino provide a major source for the Renaissance understanding of Plato's cosmology and for the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Sun–symbol in particular, although other philosophical writings will also merit attention. Although, as has been demonstrated, certain theological writings and the *Divina Commedia* of Dante with its platonic overtones had served to reinforce interest in cosmology and the Sun–Deity analogy during the Renaissance, Ficino's interpretion of Plato may also be viewed as a major source of influence for the Renaissance view of the Cosmos as well as the symbolic identification of the sun and the Deity which is found so often in Renaissance literature and philosophy. By translating Plato's works, Ficino made available the texts which had been 'lost' during the Middle Ages.[37] Apart from a few fragments, only the *Timaeus* of Plato's dialogues was at all known in the west during the Medieval period.[38] This is largely concerned with cosmology but, as is well known, Plato's cosmology was suppressed in favour of Aristotelian thought by Medieval scholastics. Aristotle's more empirical view of the universe, as expressed for example in the *De Caelo* (*On the Heavens*), held sway over the more abstract and spiritual approach of Plato.[39] But Ficino, building on the achievements of the Byzantines, Gemistos Plethon (1355–1450) and Bessarion (1403–72), who came to Italy in the

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[37]At the behest of the Medici, Ficino translated all of Plato's works into Latin during the period 1463–69. These were subsequently revised and first printed in 1496 (Dating of Ficino's writing is derived from that of Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 17). Ficino added a brief 'argumentum' to each dialogue; some he commented on at length, like *Symposium* and *Timaeus*.

[38]Robb, *Neoplatonism*, p. 11f. The Platonic tradition was diffused through Augustine and Pseudo–Dionysius, see Shorey, *Platonism*, chapter 4, 'Platonism in the Middle Ages.'

[39]For Aristotle's own discussions of Platonic Cosmology, the sphericity of the earth and its possible movement, see Aristotle, *De Caelo*, III, i, 289a–300a (ed. cit. pp. 257–269).

mid–fifteenth century,[40] was largely responsible for the revival and propagation of the Platonic philosophy. It must be remembered, as mentioned above, that this revival was not a revival of purely classical, pagan thought, but that the aims and ideas of Ficino and the other Florentine Neoplatonists was to emphasize a Christian reading of Plato's ideas. Concerning cosmological issues and the symbolic use of light or the sun as symbol of the deity, it is important to consider the ways in which Ficino and others integrated the Platonic and Christian standpoints, continually emphasizing their similarities.[41]

Ficino's translations and commentaries on major works by Plato provide important source material for Renaissance cosmology. In addition to works directly based on Plato, Ficino's own writings like the *Platonic Theology* (1469–74), the *Christian Religion* (1474), the *De Vita* (1489), the important *De Sole* (1493) and even his *Letters* (printed 1495) also include much that is relevant.[42] Interest in these writings of Ficino and his circle as an essential source for an understanding of the Renaissance has recently led to the appearance of much new material in the literature in the form of new editions and commentaries on his work. It will have been noted that the major part of scholarly discussion concerning Platonic influences in Michelangelo's work dates from the 1940's and earlier, by writers like Panofsky, Wittkower, Gombrich, Wind, Blunt and De Tolnay. Much of this discussion is based on Plato's own texts, rather than Ficino's translations and commentaries, which do contain more than a simple transmission of Plato.[43] Ficino's *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1576) seems to have been

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[40]For further information on the influence of Plethon and Bessarion (who became a Catholic Cardinal) on the formation of Renaissance Neoplatonism, see Robb, *Neoplatonism*, p. 46f., and Shorey, *Platonism*, chapter 5, 'The Renaissance.'

[41]See above, section i. It is also important to bear in mind that Ficino also translated earlier Neoplatonic sources like Plotinus and Proclus in the 1480's, as well as the so–called Hermetic writings by 1463 (Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 17–18.).

[42]For details of dating, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 17–18.

[43]References to discussions by these authors have been given above. Much subsequent discussion concerning Michelangelo's Neoplatonic tendencies in the literature remains generalized and based on these secondary sources.

used relatively little because it was, and still remains, difficult of access.[44] Recently, however, both commentaries and modern editions and transcriptions of some of Ficino's key works have become far more easily available – but this wealth of material has yet to be used fully in conjunction with the interpretation of Renaissance art. Michelangelo's Neoplatonism appears to be accepted in general terms by modern art historians, but with little in depth discussion of its precise potential sources and especially without consideration of the ever increasing amount of material on Ficino and his circle. Works now even more readily available include the *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (*De Amore*), *The Theologia Platonica*, *The De Sole*, *De Vita*, *The Philebus Commentary*, *The Phaedrus Commentary*, *The Sophist Commentary*, and the four volumes of Ficino's letters,[45] as well as numerous other extracts together with an increased amount of scholarly debate on Ficino as philosopher.[46]

The importance of cosmology in Plato's writings is reflected and emphasized in Ficino's own views and particularly evident when *Timaeus* and

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[44]Although modern editions of Ficino's *Opera Omnia* have been produced (reprinted in Turin: Bottega d'Erasmo in 1956 and 1983), the complete works proved impossible to obtain for this study, in spite of the efforts of the Inter Library Loan service. However, as will be demonstrated, a large number of separate works by Ficino which are highly relevant, are now more accessible (both in original and in translation) than ever before.

[45]See M. Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, (ed. Jayne) 1944; *De Amore*, ed. cit.; *Theologia Platonica*, ed. cit.; for *De Sole*, see A. B. Fallico and H. Shapiro (eds.) *Renaissance Philosophers. The Italian Philosophers*, New York: Modern Library, 1967, pp. 118–141; M. J. B. Allen (ed. and trans.), *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975 (and 1979); *idem*, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981; *idem*, *The Sophist Commentary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; C. Boer (trans.), *Marsilio Ficino: The Book of Life (De Vita Triplici)*, Dallas: Spring, 1980; Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London (trans.), *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 4 vols. London: Shepheard–Walwyn, 1975–1988. See also R. Waddington, 'Ficino in English,' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 14 (2) 1983, pp. 229–231, now somewhat superseded.

[46]For recent discussion of Ficino and the importance of his philosophy, see M. J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, and K. Eisenbichler and O. Z. Pugliese (eds.), *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, University of Toronto Italian Studies, Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1986.

Republic are considered. The theme is also significant both in Plato and Ficino for the way in which it is so often linked with the the allegorical interpretation of the astronomical symbol of the sun. *Timaeus* is the major source for Plato's cosmology and evidence of interest in this dialogue continuing into the sixteenth century is confirmed by the fact that the figure of Plato in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1510–1511) in the Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, bears this volume under his arm (fig. 114). In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes the creation of the Universe and its Maker, its uniqueness and its form which is dependent upon the geometrical basis of the perfect sphere or circle.[47] The question of circular celestial motion is also related to the sphericity of the cosmos, being dependent upon the circular form. The universe, says Plato, is enveloped within the World Soul and dependent upon two circles which interlock like a cross and revolve about the same point.[48] Plato also dicusses the concepts of time and infinity, the creation of sun and planets, and the idea of the stars as immortal souls. These issues: time and space, infinity and eternity, the concepts of Being and Becoming, are also clearly the issues which concerned the thinkers of the Renaissance period.[49]

Plato refers to similar themes again and again as, for example, in the *Republic*, where he speaks of the importance of the circle as a symbol of perfection and continuous generation, and he gives a clear description of the structure of the universe as comprised of revolving circles.[50] *The Republic* is also particularly

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[47] *Timaeus*, 29A–34A. See R. G. Bury, (trans.) *Plato*, vol. 9, London: Heinemann, 1981. For commentary on *Timaeus*, see Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, vol. 5, pp. 241–320.

[48] *Timaeus* 36C–37D.

[49] See Plato, *Timaeus* 38–41 and 50. For discussion of the Platonic Being and Becoming (where that which is celestial, stable and unchanging is contrasted with the earthly or human, imperfect and unstable), see *Timaeus*, 27D–28A. For discussion of Neoplatonic themes in Michelangelo's poetry, see Clements, *Poetry of Michelangelo*, pp. 228–237. Michelangelo's poem (G 102) is very much concerned with the creation of Time. For Neoplatonic ideas in the poetry of Vittoria Colonna, see also D. J. McAuliffe, 'Neoplatonism in Vittoria Colonna's Poetry,' in Eisenbichler and Pugliese, *Ficino and Renaissance Platonism*,' pp. 101–112.

[50] Plato, *Republic*, book 10, 616B–617D, (trans. P. Shorey, London: Heinemann, Loeb, 1935). Also see the edition, Plato, *The Republic* (ed. B. Radice and R. Baldick), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

significant as a source for Ficino's concept of the Good. This is combined with cosmology by Plato in *Republic* 6, where he introduces his famous metaphor of the sun as symbol of the Good and central point of the cosmic system.[51] In discussing the ideal state and ideal values, the idea of the Good as source of reality and truth, which gives intelligibility to forms and the power of knowledge to the mind, is explained by means of a direct comparison with the sun. Source of light and heat and life, the sun renders objects visible and gives seeing to the eye as the Good gives the power of knowing to the mind. The same important metaphor of light/dark contrast and the Sun–symbol is developed by Plato in the following section in conjunction with his equally famous metaphor of the Cave,[52] as Plato explains how men are to escape from the darkness of human ignorance in the cave in order to come out into the light of the sun – that is, to attain knowledge and understanding of the Good. Attention paid by Ficino to the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Republic* confirm his interest in these themes, but, as will be demonstrated, Platonic concepts of a circular cosmology and the Sun as symbol of the Good or Godhead are also developed elsewhere in his commentaries and letters, especially in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, where the ideas are further combined and developed as Ficino presents his own interpretation of God and the universe.

Of all Ficino's works, the *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (also referred to as the *De Amore*) is especially significant as a potential source for Michelangelo because of its widespread popularity and because it was regarded by Ficino as his major work and avowed by him as a condensed view of his theories and ideas.[53] It was more widely available and had more influence than many of his other works, possibly because, unlike other commentaries, it was available in

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[51]*Republic*, book 6, 508E–509B. For discussion, see Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 503–520, also Plato, *The Republic*, (ed. Radice and Baldick), p. 265, where the comparison is presented in table form. Michelangelo's well known concern for Republican ideals in his own Florence would suggest a particular interest in this work of Plato.

[52]*Republic* 7, 514A–518B.

[53]See Ficino, (ed. Jayne, 1944), p. 8; Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 19f., and Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, p. 52.

Italian as well as Latin.[54] In addition, it is a work with which Michelangelo was known to have been acquainted.[55] Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (*De Amore*) is of major importance for the Neoplatonic idea of the sun as symbol of the Deity and the cosmological ordering of the universe, but other writings of Ficino, especially the *De Sole*, the *Platonic Theology*, the *Phaedrus Commentary*, the *De Vita* and Ficino's letters, also appear significant.[56] Comments of Ficino on Plato's *Timaeus* and Plato's *Republic* 6–7, where the Sun–Deity analogy is put forward in conjunction with Plato's associated idea of the dark cave, will also require discussion. These facets of Ficino's philosophy and the Neoplatonic doctrine of ascent to God through illumination by divine light, should be examined in relation to the circular cosmology of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, arranged as it is around the depiction of Christ in the form of an 'Apollo–Christ' – a classicized version of the traditional Judaeo–Christian Sun–Deity.

iv) Ficino's Cosmology

The nature of Platonic Love is a major theme in Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, but Love is viewed as the means to reach God. According to Ficino, the universe is made coherent by God's cosmic love, which pervades all creation.[57] So Ficino's discussion in *De Amore* incorporates his quite specific views concerning the arrangement of the universe. The two major themes of a circular, moving cosmology and the interpretation of the deity as a Sun–symbol in the centre of the universe permeate this work. References to the creation and ordering of the universe and the Platonic concept of the Deity are always brought, by Ficino, firmly into line with Christian thinking. Plato's monotheism has also

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[54]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 20.

[55]Summers, *Language of Art*, p. 9.

[56]Ficino's concerns with sun–symbolism and cosmology are widely discussed by Kristeller, *Ficino*, especially in part 2 'Being and the Universe.' Allen also lays a great emphasis on Ficino's concern with cosmology (Allen, *Platonism of Ficino*, especially chapter 6.).

[57]Jayne suggests Dante's *Convivio* as influential on this thought (Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 11–13).

received much comment. He uses the term 'Demiurge' to refer to the single divine force or maker and he also uses the term 'theos' or 'God' in a distinctly monotheistic way.[58] Viewed as a personification of 'The Good,' the supreme intelligence or World–Soul, the Platonic concept is taken by Ficino as a direct equivalent with the Christian God, and this is emphasized in Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium.*[59] In the first speech of this work, Ficino's discussion of the creation is explained in these terms and he immediately introduces the metaphor of the sun. As in the book of Genesis, Ficino speaks of the importance of Light, the divine light of Knowledge, in the creation of the world; he explains how the Mind or Soul is turned towards God 'in the same way in which the eye is directed towards the light of the sun,' as light gives form to the chaos of darkness.[60] This use of light/dark symbolism and the sun metaphor, familiar to Ficino from Plato's *Republic*, books 6 and 7, was to be used repeatedly in this and later works by him.

Soon after the introduction of the Platonic Sun–metaphor, in speech 1, chapter 3, Ficino introduces the other major issue, namely that of circularity and circular motion of the universe:

> ...there exists a certain continuous attraction (beginning from God, emanating to the World, and returning at last to God) which returns again, as if in a kind of circle, to the same place whence it issued.[61]

Ficino continues by relating this concept to other, well known Neoplatonic ideas concerning Love and Beauty:

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[58] *Timaeus* 28C, 30A, and *Republic*, book 2. For discussion see Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 503–521.

[59] Kristeller, *Ficino*, especially pp. 60–62, 145, 261; Allen, *Platonism of Ficino*, pp. 56–57, 108–110. See Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 38, 'The first of all things is God, the author of all things, whom we call "the Good" itself.' ('Primum omnium est Deus, universorum auctor, quod ipsum bonum dicimus,' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 39). As elsewhere, Ficino makes reference to 'God' without distinction between the three persons of the Christian Trinity.

[60] Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 38–39. See also Chastel, *Ficin et l'art*, especially pp. 81–85, for adaptation of Ficino's light symbolism in art.

[61] Ficino, *De Amore*, speech 2, chapter 2, p. 46 ('unus quidem continuus attractus est a Deo incipiens, transiens in mundum, in Deum denique desinens, qui quasi circulo quodam in idem inde manavit, iterum remeat,' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 43).

> Inasmuch as it begins in God and attracts to Him, it is called Beauty; inasmuch as emanating to the world, it captivates it, it is called Love; inasmuch as returning to its author it joins His work to Him, it is called Pleasure.[62]

In this important section, Ficino links the concept of Divine Love and the Good to the idea of the circularity of the universe by referring to traditional writings and interpretations of the Church Fathers:

> This was expressed in that famous hymn of Hierotheus and Dionysius the Areopagite, where these theologians sang as follows: "Love is a good circle which always revolves from the Good to the Good."[63]

Coupled here with the Neoplatonic themes of Love and Beauty in which Michelangelo had undoubted interest, Ficino's view of cosmology does seem to correspond well with the circular arrangement of the cosmos in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco, contrasting with the Medieval approach to a horizontally layered hierarchical scheme.

Ficino's references to Pseudo–Dionysius serve to confirm his Christian intent and his view of the Christian God as synonymous with Platonic concepts like Beauty, Love and the Good. He also quotes Dionysius as supportive of the specific analogy between sun and Deity. He continues:

> Not without reason does Dionysius compare God to the Sun, for just as the sun gives light and warmth to the body, so God offers the light of truth and the warmth of love to souls. We certainly infer this comparison from the sixth book of Plato 'On the Republic'....[64]

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[62]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 46 ('... prout in Deo incipit et allicit, pulchritudo; prout in mundum transiens ipsum rapit, amor; prout in auctorem remeans ipsi suum opus coniungit, voluptas,' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 43).

[63]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 46 ('Id sibi voluit Hierothei et Dionysii Areopagitæ hymnus ille praeclarus, ubi sic hi theologi cecinerunt: *Amor circulus est bonus a bono in bonum perpetuo revolutus*,' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 43).

[64]Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 46–47 ('Nec inuria soli Deum comparat Dionysius, quia quemadmodum sol illuminat corpus et caleficit, ita Deus animis veritatis claritatem praebet, et caritatis ardorem. Hanc utique comparationem ex Platonis libro *De Republica* sexto hoc quo dicam modo colligimus...' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 43). Ficino emphasizes the similarities between Dionysius and Plato, 'Thus the

This clearly confirms that the Early Christian analogy between the Sun and Christ, and the exegesis of the metaphor by the early Church Fathers was well known in the Italian Renaissance, to Ficino among others. Ficino traces the analogy even further back to its origins in Greek philosophy and, acknowledging his own sources in Plato, he repeatedly draws a direct comparison between the Christian analogy of Sun and Deity and Plato's writing in the sixth book of the *Republic*, and summarises Platonic ideas.[65]

Linked with his discussions of the Platonic Sun–symbol, are Ficino's comments on the circular cosmological arrangement of the universe. References in the *De Amore* are numerous but, in particular, chapter 3 of speech 2 appears significant. The section is entitled 'Beauty is the radiance of Divine Goodness and God is the centre of Four Circles' ('Pulchritudo est Splendor Divinae Bonitatis et Deus est Centrum Quattuor Circulorum'), and Ficino is quite specific about his concept of the arrangement of the universe. He reasons carefully why God should be situated at the centre of a circular universe, and his views continue to be very much linked up with Plato's concept of the Good, viewed as equivalent to the Christian God. Referring again to ancient precedent, Ficino places the Good in the single centre of a circular universe.

Although Ficino is dealing with metaphysical, metaphorical and transcendental hierarchies in order to explain his ideas, he does imbue them with an almost physical existence. His circular cosmological arrangement is not a system of reality in the modern scientific sense but, in Renaissance terms, it seems to be perceived by him in a literal or physical way, as well as in the spiritual one. Thus this platonic concept of the Deity is viewed as the central point of the universe. He writes, chapter 3,

The single centre of everything is God. The four circles [illegible] and God are the

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difference between Plato and Dionysius is only a matter of words rather than of opinion,' (*De Amore*, p. 111).

[65]See above, opening quotation to this chapter, from Ficino, *De Amore*, speech 6, chapter 13. Compare Plato, *Republic* 6 (transl. P. Shorey), pp. 100–107, and version in Radice and Baldick (eds.), pp. 265 and 272–274.

> Mind, the Soul, Nature and Matter..... the reason why we call God the 'centre' and the other four, 'circles,' we explain...[66]

In discussing whether Ficino considered that this system possessed potential for actual physical existence, it is important to remember that Michelangelo, as an artist, would naturally tend towards a tangible and visual interpretation and, even as a metaphor, this would be valid. Ficino proceeds to explain his circular cosmology in terms of the meaning of the circle as symbol of perfection and eternity along similar lines to St Augustine. In a passage remarkably similar to Dante and Augustine, he too stresses the central generating point of the circle, where God is situated. Ficino lays great emphasis on the point of origin of the circle, namely that point which generates the form in all its perfection.[67] Ficino demonstrates how a circle must be dependent upon a single point, and, referring back, once more, to the sun symbol, he expands this metaphor to relate to the formation of the universe, showing how 'rays' or lines move outwards in the universe from a same single point of origin – in the same way that rays spread out from the sun. He emphasizes the significance of the point which generates the circles of the universe:

> The centre of the circle is a point, single, indivisible and motionless. From it, many lines which are divisible and mobile are drawn out to the circumference which is like them. This divisible circumference revolves around the centre as its axis.[68]

Ficino compares this 'point' with God himself, and continues,

> Who will deny that God is rightly called the centre of all things since He is

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[66]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 47 ('Centrum unum omnium Deus est. Circuli quattuor circa id assidue revoluti, mens, anima, natura, materia..... Caeterum cur Deum quidem centrum, quattuor illa cur circulos appellemus exponam.' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 44).

[67]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 47 (ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 45). Compare Augustine, *On the Magnitude of the Soul*, chapters 7–12, discussed above, chapter 5, and Dante, especially *Paradiso* from Canto XXVIII.

[68]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 47 ('Centrum circuli punctum est, unum, indivisibile, stabile. Inde lineae multae dividuae, mobiles ad earum similem circumferentiam deducuntur; quae sane circumferentia divisibilis circa centrum quasi cardinem volvitur;' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 44).

> present in all things, completely single, simple and motionless? But all things produced from Him are many, composite, and in some way movable, and as they flow from Him so they flow back to Him, in the manner of lines and a circumference.[69]

Ficino's view of the central Deity, which he explains and develops further in this chapter,[70] contains echoes of Dante. His exposition of the central point in his conceptual universe conjures up a visual image of the sun and its rays which seemingly corresponds with the composition of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco (figs. 1, 52 and 53). The importance of the sun's rays as originating at a specific point and extending outward to the circumference may easily be perceived in the fresco, and was evidently read as such by early copyists, as has already been demonstrated (fig. 66). Ficino's interpretation here would seem to correspond well with Michelangelo's fresco in the way in which the circles and circular movement appear to be generated from the same central point. The diagonal lines in the *Last Judgment*, fanning outwards like 'rays,' also seem to originate in the same area as the circular composition, namely in Christ himself.[71]

Ficino's comments on the immobility of the central generating point raise the question of the ambiguity of the pose of Christ in Michelangelo's fresco. The view of God as centre and mover of the universe may be related here to the somewhat complex question of movement in Michelangelo's fresco. Most scholars are in agreement over the idea of circular movement in the overall composition of

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[69]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 47–48 ('Quis negat Deum centrum omnium merito nominari, cum omnibus insit unus penitus, simplex. atque immobilis; cuncta vero ab ipso producta, multa, composita, et mobilia sint, atque ut ab eo manant, ita in eum instar linearum et circumferentiae refluant? Ita, mens, anima, natura, materia procedentes a Deo in eundem redire nituntur, seque undique pro viribus in illum circumferunt.' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 44). Similarities with Dante's system from *Paradiso* XXXVIII are apparent. As Kristeller states ('Renaissance Thought and the Arts,' p. 58f.) it is an exaggeration to say that the Renaissance was completely man–centred and no longer God–centred.

[70]Other references to circular cosmology, the Sun–symbol as Deity and the sun's rays in Ficino, *De Amore*, are numerous, for example, pp. 48–49, 76–78, 90–92. For discussion of Ficino's use of Sun–symbolism, see especially Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 98, 127, 153–159, 228–233, 251–253.

[71]See formal analysis, chapter 4, section ii above.

the fresco and also with the view that Christ's pose is suggestive of movement, although some art historians regard Christ's pose as ambiguous, being neither seated nor standing, neither moving nor still.[72]

The Aristotelian view of the universe, as outlined in his *De Caelo* which was so influential through the Middle Ages, concurs with the concept of the Creator as 'Unmoved Mover' of the universe. Aristotle reasons that if everything which is in motion must be moved by some other force, then self–motion becomes impossible. He deduces, therefore, that the originator of circular, celestial motion must be something which is capable of instigating motion while itself remaining unmoved, that is, the Unmoved Mover.[73] This theme apparently fits in well with Ficino's concept of a stationary Point generating the movement of the cosmos, which is also emphasized by Dante. Yet Michelangelo's Christ is set in an ambiguous pose which may imply either motion or a stationary generating force.

Aristotle's theory of celestial motion bears some relation to that of Plato – but for Plato self–motion was not impossible. In fact, in complete contrast with Aristotle, Plato argues 'motion' as evidence of immortality: 'Spontaneous motion is prior to communicated [motion], and the Prime Mover of all is a self–mover, identified with Soul, the life principle.'[74] The same concept is expressed in *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*.[75] Aristotle did consider this premise of original, self–caused motion, stating at one point: 'The activity of a god is immortality, that is, eternal life. Therefore the god must be characterized by eternal motion' but he later disputes this, saying that, even if the whole body of the universe revolves in circular motion, the central point of that circle must remain still.[76]

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[72]Steinberg in particular comments on the ambiguity of Christ's pose and the discussion surrounding it (Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 50; *idem*, 'Missing Leg, Twenty Years After,' p. 501).

[73]Aristotle, *De Caelo*, pp. xvii–xix.

[74]For Ficino's comparison of Aristotle and Plato, see Allen, *Philebus*, p. 175.

[75]Also *Laws* 897–898. The concept is discussed by Ficino in his *Phaedrus Commentary* (Allen, *Phaedran Charioteer*, p. 86).

[76]For Aristotle on the significance of the circular universe, see Aristotle, *De Caelo*, especially book II, iv and book III, section ii. He declares the immobility of the centre of the rotating circular universe (ed. cit. p. 245), but locates this in the

Reinterpretations of Aristotle's doctrines, including that of the 'Unmoved Mover,' were the most commonly accepted basis of thought during the Middle Ages. His views lay behind the Medieval concept of the universe and, as such, contributed to the standard and traditional interpretation of the Last Judgment. With the revival of Plato in the late fifteenth century, this view came to be reconsidered, as evidenced by the writings of Ficino. It seems unlikely that Michelangelo, in that climate of discussion between Platonic and Aristotelian thought (epitomised by Raphael's *School of Athens*, fig. 114), should arbitrarily decide on the depiction of circular movement energized by a forceful Christ figure, in his *Last Judgment* fresco, without considering such theological and philosophical connotations. If the pose of Christ is to be read as ambiguous, it is possible to suggest that here, as elsewhere, Michelangelo may have been incorporating 'new' Neoplatonic ideas into an existing framework of traditional ideas. It seems that the depiction of movement in the fresco, and the ambiguous pose of Christ Himself, is related to Platonic cosmology, and Christ's pose is ambiguous because He is an immortal Deity to whom the confinements of human posture do not apply. Reference is made to the Aristotelian concepts based on a single unmoving point, as well as the Platonic which views the immortal God, the Prime Mover or World–Soul, as a self–moving circle, identified with the life principle. Michelangelo suppresses the Aristotelian view in favour of the Neoplatonic whilst yet not totally rejecting the tradition, but incorporating it into the new framework.

In a similar manner, the circularity of Michelangelo's scheme appears to take up another Platonic concept without totally abandoning the traditional or Aristotelian view – namely the 'Up for Heaven' and 'Down for Hell' concept of the universe. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Aristotelian view of earthly motion was deemed as taking place in a straight line, and only celestial motion was perfect, circular and eternal. While light objects tend up and away

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earth at this time.

from the earth, heavy objects tend straight downwards; circular motion was only attributed to celestial objects. Plato discusses this in *Timaeus* and presents alternative arguments which are also considered by Ficino in his *Commentary* on that book. Plato examines the notions of 'heavy' and 'light', of 'above' and 'below,' and concludes that 'inasmuch as the whole heaven is spherical, all its outermost parts, being equally distant from the centre, must really be 'outermost' in a similar degree.'[77] According to Plato, Aristotle's view of 'above and below' is erroneous and there is no 'up' or 'down' but only 'innermost' or 'outermost' in the universe. He says: '...seeing that the whole is spherical, the assertion that it has one region 'above' and one region 'below' does not become a man of sense.'[78] This transition from the Aristotelian view, accepted in the Middle Ages, to the Platonic view popular in Renaissance Italy appears to fit in well with the overall disposition of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* where the circular format is stressed. Yet, in many respects, Michelangelo does not wholly reject the ancient tradition, for, as has been pointed out already in chapter 4, the suggestion of a layered up/down arrangement in the fresco is not totally abandoned. Rather, Platonic cosmology is imposed upon and within the existing framework.

As a potential source for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Plato's *Timaeus* is important for the way in which Plato also discusses the cosmological aspect of individual souls in relation to the concept of the Immortality of the Soul. Plato's analogy between souls and stars, and the assimilation of this concept by the Renaissance Neoplatonists, is well known, and the theme does seem to fit in well with the cosmological interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* where the souls of the blessed and damned are arranged around the figure of Christ, just as the stars and other Heavenly bodies are arranged near the Sun.[79] In addition, in the

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[77]Plato, *Timaeus*, 62C–63A.

[78]Plato, *Timaeus*, 63B (and compare, *ibid.*, 37A for comment on the circularity of the universe and notions of infinity and eternity). Ficino and others followed Plato in questioning the arrangement of the Aristotelian spherical universe which still had a 'top and bottom.'

[79]Plato, *Timaeus* 38D–39E. See Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 386–387, for discussion.

Timaeus, Plato actually describes the physical disposition and movement of the individual souls, and he says,

> '...they were causing constant and widespread motion....joining with the perpetually flowing stream in moving and violently shaking the revolutions of the soul, they totally blocked the course of the same by flowing contrary thereto....they produced all manner of twistings, and caused in their circles fractures and disruptions of every possible kind, with the result that, as they barely held together with one another, they moved indeed but irrationally, being at one time reversed, at another oblique and again upside down.'[80]

This reads as though it was a description of the individual figures in Michelangelo's fresco (fig. 64).

Thus the concepts of circularity and circular motion appear to have been inextricably linked with broader cosmological concepts which were under discussion at the time and very much related to Renaissance Neoplatonic thinking: Christian and Platonic notions of the generation and composition of the universe, the World–Soul and the Immortality of the Soul. Concern with the human soul and its fate after death is a concept which comes under discussion again and again in Ficino's translations and commentaries on Plato's dialogues.[81] Drawing on Plato, in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, Ficino draws attention to the role of God as the centre of everything, but he equates this with the Platonic concept of the World–Soul, which is also viewed as a movable circle. Ficino's cosmology is thus closely related to his concept of the Immortality of the Soul – a concept which, it has often been stated, has found expression in Michelangelo's works. The central God is viewed as pure spirit, the Good or World–Soul to which the human soul is united on death.

Ficino also analyses the different regions within the cosmic ordering of the

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[80]Plato, *Timaeus* 43B–43E. Compare Ficino, *De Amore*, speech 6, chapter 15 for the motion of Souls.

[81]See Kristeller, *Ficino*, especially chapter 15, 'The Theory of Immortality.'

universe around the central concept of God. Four regions, Mind, Soul, Nature and Matter, proceed from God, the fifth element in Ficino's 'Theory of Five Substances.'[82] The 'Angelic Mind' is immovable ('it is movable only in that it turns towards God').[83] The 'World–Soul' is a movable circle ('mobile but orderly'). 'Nature' is mobile but confused; and 'Matter' concludes the cosmological scheme.[84] This scheme is discussed by Gombrich, together with its relevance in Renaissance Italy, and a diagrammatic interpretation is suggested in the form of a series of concentric circles.[85] Some visual correspondence might be traced between this scheme and the distinct areas of Michelangelo's fresco; namely, that the Angelic Mind is represented in the area of the Lunettes (figs. 60, 61), the Soul in the figures of the inner circle (fig. 54), Nature in the outer circle, and Matter in the earthly zone at the base (fig. 1) – which is a matter that merits further investigation.

Platonic cosmology and the concept of the Deity as equivalent to the symbol of the sun are repeatedly emphasized in Ficino's writings. The parallel is continuously drawn throughout his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* and especially again in speech 2, chapter 5. Here, Ficino draws an analogy between the

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[82]According to Kristeller, the concept derives from Plotinus and Proclus and ultimately Plato's *Republic* 6 (Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 106–08, 167–69, 400–01, etc.); for further discussion, see also A. Sheppard, 'The Influence of Hermias on Marsilio Ficino's Doctrine of Inspiration,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43, 1980, pp. 97–109; M. J. B. Allen, 'Two Commentaries on the *Phaedrus*, Ficino's Indebtedness to Hermias,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43, 1980, pp. 110–129; and *idem*, 'Ficino's Theory of the Five substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*,' *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 12 (1) 1982, pp. 19–44.

[83]Allen contends that Ficino's theory of the Five Substances leads to the disappearance of the traditional role of the angels from the universal hierarchy, replaced to an extent by the concept of soul. This interpretation could perhaps account for Michelangelo's unusual approach to angels in his fresco, whose winglessness remains a point of controversy (M. J. B. Allen, 'The Absent Angel in Ficino's Philosophy,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36, 1975, pp. 219–240). Allen further demonstrates the importance of wing–symbolism in Ficino's writings and his image of the soul 'shedding its wings' as it flies up to God (Allen, *Platonism of Ficino*, pp. 100–101, 106–108).

[84]Discussed by Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 47–49, and also developed in the *Theologia Platonica*, *passim*. For further explanation, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 106–108, 167–169, 400f.

[85]E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1985, pp. 168–170 and unnumbered fig. on p. 170.

'supreme light of the sun itself' and the 'glow of God' which illuminates the universe in the same way. The light of the sun is often used with symbolic meaning in connection with the Deity throughout the remainder of the work.[86] When considering the Sun–Christ of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, it is interesting to note how Ficino draws the analogy between God and Beauty, as well as God and the sun, and then discusses how this allegorical–symbolical God may be depicted in human form. He relates how Agathon, the poet in Plato's *Symposium*, describes the figure in the image of a handsome young man, 'young, tender, flexible, or agile, well–proportioned and glowing,'[87] – in fact as beauty personified, analogized with the Good. A correspondence between this physical description and Michelangelo's Apollo–Christ seems to be a strong possibility.[88]

In his *De Amore*, Ficino thus not only refers to circular cosmology and includes direct use of the Sun–Deity metaphor, but he also frequently acknowledges his own ultimate philosophical source for these concepts in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Republic* (book 6). Ficino's translations and interpretations of Plato's *Symposium*, *Timaeus* and *Republic* are evidently very important for the

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[86]Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 71, 73, 75–79, 89–91, 134–135.

[87]The chapter is entitled 'De Amoris Pictura,' and Ficino significantly refers here to the art of painting. Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 95 ('Agatho vero poeta veterum poetarum more deum istum humana vestit imagine pingitque ipsum hominum instar formosum, *iuvenum*, *tenerum*, *flexibilem*, *sive agilem*, *apte compositum atque nitidum*,' ed. Jayne, 1944, p. 72).

[88]Many other themes dealt with by Plato, especially in the *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, and by Ficino in his *Commentaries*, appear relevant to an understanding of Michelangelo and his work, although space does not allow for additional discussion of these. For example, the flesh/spirit dichotomy is examined (*Phaedo*, especially, 62D–64D, 70C–84B), as well as the theme of interconnection between Love and Beauty (*Symposium*, 182A–184D, and *De Amore*, especially speeches 3 and 5). The idea of the Immortality of the Soul is discussed in terms of immortality through one's progeny or achievements (*Symposium*, 208C–209E) and, although his letters demonstrate his concern for the continuation of his family through his nephew's heirs, Michelangelo noted 'the works I leave behind will be my sons' (Vasari, ed. de Vere, p. 1931; ed. Bull, p. 428). Ficino's interpretations of the character of Socrates suggest a great affinity with Michelangelo: Socrates was fearless and brave, but melancholy by nature. He was lean and sinewy and lived simply and frugally, sometimes sleeping in his clothes. Socrates was the son of a stone–cutter and midwife and 'made his living with his own hands by cutting stones' (Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 155–157; compare Vasari's descriptions of Michelangelo, ed. de Vere, p. 1933; ed. Bull, p. 430f.). That this might have had an influence, as role–model, upon the youthful Michelangelo in the house of Lorenzo de' Medici seems highly likely.

formation of Renaissance cosmology and world view, but the related themes of Sun–symbolism in the perception of the Deity and the cosmological ordering of the universe also permeate many of Ficino's other writings. These, in turn, serve to demonstrate the widespread discussion and acceptance of the concept. For example, in his translation and Commentary on Plato's *Philebus* (1469),[89] which is closely related to his *Symposium Commentary*, Ficino is mainly concerned with discussion of Plato's concept of the Highest Good, the One, and he refers again to cosmology, Sun–symbolism and specifically to *Republic* 6 and 7.[90] Similarly, the *Phaedrus Commentary* (published 1496) contains several references to the idea of the One and related themes of the movement and central 'point' of the universe. He describes how : 'various souls circle round with various heavenly beings, and repeat these same circuits by turns,' which, bearing similarities to Dante's description of the spirits in *Paradiso*, might also be taken as descriptive of the arrangement of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.[91]

Apart from Ficino's direct commentaries on Plato, in his own works (which were obviously closely related to Plato's thought even if not direct commentaries or translations) similar themes recur over and over again. The *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animae* (1469–74)[92] and *De Christiana*

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[89]See Allen, *Philebus Commentary*. For the importance and dating of this work, see *ibid.*, pp. 1f., 15, and 48f.

[90]*Ibid.*, for example, pp. 108, 228, 230 and 238f. For sun and light symbolism in general, see *ibid.*, pp. 92, 118, 144, 182–184, 196 and, for cosmic circular motion of the Souls, pp. 86, 124, 156, and the 'central point,' pp. 358–362.

[91]See Allen, *Phaedran Charioteer*, pp. 86–87, 106–107 and 236–238 (note the references to Apollo). For Sun–symbolism and the Apollo theme in Ficino's *Phaedrus Commentary*, see Allen, *Platonism of Ficino*, pp. 30, 66f., 119–120. Allen deals with the Platonic idea of the soul returning to its maker on death, which seem appropriate to Michelangelo's subject; also, Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 91.

[92]See Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* (ed. cit., reprint Olms, 1975). A recent French translation is ed. and trans. R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin: Théologie Platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*. 3 vols. Paris, 1964–70. Certain extracts have been published by Burroughs, 'Ficino,' reprinted in E. Cassirer, P. O. Kristeller and J. H. Randall, *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 185–212. The great importance of this work is discussed by Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 33f. See also A. B. Collins, *The Secular is Sacred. Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino's Platonic Theology*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974 (especially pp. 2, 28–29, 76–83 and *passim* for Ficino's use of Sun–metaphor).

Religione (1474)[93] represent a synthesis of Plato's thought and Ficino's own Christian thinking, greatly influenced by Augustine and Proclus. The *Platonic Theology* represents Ficino's attempt to understand his own soul and embraces discussion of the familiar themes of Ficino's thought: the notions of time and eternity, the relationship between the flesh and the spirit or soul and the cosmological ordering of the universe. The metaphor of light as symbolic of knowledge and the Good and the sun as symbolic of the Deity is examined where Ficino describes the paradoxical concept of how the light descends from the sun without leaving the sun, and how, in order to see the sun, the light of the sun is necessary.[94] Notions derived from Plato are clearly imbued with Christian meaning. In book 3, chapter 2, Ficino turns his discussion to the cosmological arrangement of the universe, based, as in the *De Amore*, on the cosmology of the circle and the Point which is the centre of the circle. Referring to previous discourses on the importance of the World–Soul (mentioned above), he describes the perpetual circular motion of the universe and its all important centre: 'The greatest wonder in Nature....the middle point of all that is, the chain of the world, the face of all and the knot and bond of the universe.'[95]

Ficino's love of Sun–symbolism and cosmology also permeates his more popular work of the *De Vita Libri Tres* or *Book of Life* of 1489.[96] Begun as a

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[93]See Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 17, 293, 339.

[94]For sun and light symbolism in the *Theologia Platonica*, see book 8F (ed. cit., p. 121), 15E (p. 261), 18B (p. 334); for the Sun as the Good, book 2, caput 10 (ed. cit., pp. 16–17); for the circular universe with God as centre, Book 2E (p. 30), 4B (p. 56), 11D (p. 185), 16D (p. 300), 18F (p. 326). Cf. translated sections in Burroughs, 'Ficino,' pp. 228, 230–232, 237. Note the interesting section on art from book 13 chapter 3, *ibid.*, pp. 233–34, and cf. similar comments in *De Christiane Religione*, where the simile of the sun is used in the same way: 'one cannot see without the sun... the soul is illuminated by divine light and recognizes God,' quoted by Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 94.

[95]Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, book 3, caput 2 (ed. cit. p. 45) 'Hoc maximum est in natura miraculum.... centrum naturae, universorum mediu, mundi series, vultus omnium, noduque et copula mundi.' Translation from Burroughs, 'Ficino,' p. 231, also quoted by Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 120.

[96]C. Boer (trans.), *Marsilio Ficino, The Book of Life (De Vita Triplici)*, Dallas: Spring, 1980, which must however be treated with care (see review by M. J. B. Allen, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 25, 1982, pp. 69–72 and Waddington, 'Ficino in English,' p. 230). [A more scholarly recent edition, C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, *Marsilio Ficino. Three Books on Life. A critical edition and translation with*

commentary on Plotinus, the *De Vita* is indicative of Ficino's interests in astrology and even magic.[97] Here, amidst recommendations for the ideal way of life for the student or man of letters, the theme of the sun and its symbolism is presented particularly strongly. The text concerns medicine, astrology and magic and refers to sun imagery in these specific contexts. It does, however, demonstrate the prevalence of these themes. References to the sun's influence on man's life and work are numerous, and embrace the use of the same type of metaphorical symbolism.[98] The desirability of association with 'Solar' elements is recommended since 'the Sun is Lord of Life,' and the comparison between the Deity and the sun is again demonstrated.[99]

Ficino's popular *Book of Life*, with its pervading emphasis on sun imagery was almost certainly known to Michelangelo[100] as also, perhaps, were Ficino's letters, which, although written privately, were gathered by Ficino and published in 1495.[101] The Sun–Deity metaphor again occurs intermittently in Ficino's letters and is used by him with reference to both the Christian Deity and Platonic notions of the Good.[102] Similar references to the themes of the *Commentaries*, like the ordering of the universe and the concept of the God–centred circular

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introduction and Notes, New York: Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989, was not available at the time of writing]. T. Moore, *The Planets Within. Marsilio Ficino's Astrological Psychology*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982, chapter 7, 'Sol,' should be used with caution.

[97]For which see Garin, *Astrology*, *passim*; D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Nedeln: Kraus reprint, 1976 (1st ed. London, 1958); F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, chapter 4, 'Ficino's Natural Magic, pp. 62–83.

[98]See for example, Ficino, *Book of Life*, (ed. Boer), especially pp. 13–17, 48f., 89f., 97–101, 129–131, 151f.

[99]*Ibid.*, p. 98. Ficino also makes numerous references to Apollo, as guide, doctor and the means of healing for the soul in a kind of parallel to the Christian context (pp. 1–3, 12, 17, 35, 59, 162). Cf. also H. Brabant and S. Zylberzac, 'Le Soleil dans la médecine à la Renaissance,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 279–298.

[100]The *De Vita* has also been claimed as an important source for Dürer (Panofsky et al., *Saturn and Melencolia*).

[101]Ficino's letters were widely known and circulated; they have recently become more easily available through the four volume edition cited.

[102]Ficino, *Letters*, especially vol. 1, pp. 61, 81, 165, 193, 197; vol. 2, p. 29; vol. 3, pp. 14, 19, 46, 56–58; vol. 4, pp. 12, 23, 34, 47, and 62, 'the Sun signifies God.'

cosmology, are also frequent and demonstrate the topical subjects of debate, which often had interest shown in them by art patrons and those in authority.[103]

Most important perhaps of all Ficino's writings, however, as a direct potential influence upon Michelangelo's view of a God–centred cosmology based on the Christian interpretation of the Platonic Sun–metaphor, are his *Orphica Comparativo Solis ad Deum* (1480), and the *De Lumine* and the *Liber de Sole* (1487) which were published together in 1493.[104] Described as a 'fine example of the solar literature of the period,' in which Ficino attempted 'to synthesize age–old doctrines concerning the sun with his own Neoplatonized version of Christianity,'[105] *De Sole* was likely to have been known to Michelangelo, because of its general popularity. Here, Ficino begins by discussing the significant analogy between the light of the Sun and God, the Supreme Good, with reference to the nature of allegory, and he comments on the ways in which the light of the sun is similar to God, the Supreme Good.[106] 'Nothing,' he says, 'reminds us of the nature of Good more than light,' and the metaphor of the Good as light is extended to embrace the Christian God: 'The Sun alone can indicate to you God himself. The Sun will give you clear signs. Who will dare to say that the Sun is false?'[107] Ficino emphasizes the role of the Sun as the illuminating Lord and regulator of the skies, and he refers directly to the 'Solar Deity.' Conscious of the ancient reverence paid

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[103]For example, *Letters*, vol. 1, nos. 7, 42 and 43, vol. 2, no. 63; vol. 4, no. 33. Interest was shown in astrological sources by various members of the Medici family, particularly Leo X and Cosimo I (see J. Cox–Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art, Pontormo, Leo X and the two Cosimos*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, especially part 3, 'Cosmic and Dynastic Imagery in the Art of Leo X,' pp. 155–228). Reference is made to Michelangelo's commission by the Medici for the Medici chapel in S Lorenzo and the cosmic imagery used there (*ibid.*, pp. 225–227).

[104]A Latin manuscript edition of *De Sole* and *De Sole et Lumine* is in the University Library Cambridge (ref. L.9.23); for a modern translation see Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 118–141.

[105]Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. xi.

[106]*Ibid.*, p. 119.

[107]*Ibid.*, p. 120–121. 'Nulla magis quam lumen refert naturam boni...Sol vero maxime Deum ipsum tibi significare potest. Sol tibi signa dabit sole quis dicere falsum audeat (caput 2). Compare Virgil, *Georgics* (trans. H. R. Fairclough, London: Heinemann, Loeb, 1978), I, 463 ('Solem quis dicere falsum audeat,' p. 112) as a possible source.

to the sun and Apollo, he stresses the Sun's role in cycles of birth and death.[108] The analogy with the Christian Deity is emphasized as Ficino explains why the sun serves as metaphor for the Trinity and that it is the Visible Image of God. In chapter 9 in particular, the image is very strongly developed, and Ficino even alludes to the role of Christ as Sun at the time of judgment when he will awaken the dead like the new sun awakens the world each spring (caput 9).[109] Ficino then turns his attention to the role of the sun in creation – 'the Sun was the first to be created and was placed at the center of the sky...It sits, as if occupying a rock in the centre in the manner of a king.'[110] Ficino was clearly aware of sources for the metaphor in the Old Testament and the Church Fathers like Augustine and Pseudo–Dionysius, as well as Plato. He was also aware of the association between the pagan and Early Christian traditions, since he refers to the institution of the Day of the Lord as the Solar day.[111] The following chapters develop Ficino's discussion of the Sun as symbol for God, its appropriateness as an analogy with the Trinity, and as explanation of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Indeed, the work as a whole is very strongly suggestive of source material for Michelangelo's fresco, as is the associated *De Lumine*, which contains similar material, especially since the influence of these texts and commentaries was known to be very far reaching.[112] His writings were not only known in Italy. They also circulated Europe as far as Cracow, and the possible influence of Neoplatonic cult of the sun on Copernicus' formulation of his heliocentric theory has been noted, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

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[108] *Ibid.*, pp. 121–124.

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[110] Caput 10, 'Comparatio Solis ad Deum,' *ibid.*, p. 131–2, ('Sol primo creatus et in medio coelo'). Compare with quotation from Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus*, p. 1, above.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[112] Particularly chapter 14. For dissemination of Ficino's writings and ideas, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 93, *idem*, *Eight Philosophers*, pp. 42–43; Koyré, *Astronomical Revolution*, p. 65 and Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, p. 130.

v) Michelangelo's Hell and Plato's Cave

Amongst Ficino's commentaries on the Platonic texts of *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*, which appear relevant to a discussion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, book 6 of the *Republic*, with its exposition of the analogy between the sun and the Good or God, appears to be a key text. The close relationship between this and the following section (*Republic* 7) has been widely recognized, by modern commentators no less than Ficino himself, and thus also merits consideration in connection with Michelangelo's fresco. It appears significant that *Republic* 7 is that in which Plato introduces his famous metaphor of the Cave, one of the most familiar of all Platonic passages, which is inextricably linked with the Sun–metaphor of his previous section. This in turn may help to explain Michelangelo's depiction of the lower regions and of Hell in his *Last Judgment* fresco, which has long puzzled scholars – mainly owing to the unusual depiction of a 'Cave of Hell' immediately above the altar of the Sistine Chapel.[113]

Following on from his use of Sun–imagery in *Republic* 6, Plato begins his description of the Cave, 'Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern,'[114] and then he goes on to describe men who sit fettered with their backs to a fire, able to see only the shadows cast on the wall of the cave by moving objects or artefacts. These they assume to be 'reality'. Philosophy can enable them to become free by drawing them out in painful ascent to the realm of day, where all is illuminated 'by the dazzling light of the sun...to rise through the pure ideas of reason to the idea of Good.'[115] Simply stated, their situation in the cave is symbolic

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[113]A full examination of the following discussion has been developed in a separate paper, 'Hell in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' [submitted]. See also discussion by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 43 and Steinberg, 'Corner of the *Last Judgment*,' especially pp. 243–250. Connected with this problem is the reason for the reverse orientation of the chapel, discussed above, chapter 4, section i and chapter 5, section i.

[114]Plato, *Republic* 7, 514A–517B. For commentary and notes, see Plato, *Republic* (ed. Shorey), pp. 118–133; and Shorey, *What Plato Said*, pp. 234–239. Since space does not allow full discussion of what is considered to be reality by Plato, the word "real" is here used in inverted commas, following Shorey.

[115]*Ibid.*, 517–521D.

of human bondage and ignorance.[116] Plato demonstrates how these 'perpetual prisoners' may be freed by light; and here he refers back to the Sun–metaphor which dominates the previous section.

The men of the cave are to be freed and 'drawn out into the light of the sun.' At first the light of the sun blinds even more, but then the human soul becomes accustomed to the light and enveloped in its warmth and goodness. This process allegorically represents the contemplation of higher things (the Good, according to Plato; God, according to Ficino). The soul can then ascend to the intelligible region. As in the analogy with the sun, the last and the most difficult thing to perceive is the idea of the Good – the Sun itself. The process of illumination is arduous for the soul because 'the passage from the deeper dark of ignorance into a more luminous world and the greater brightness had dazzled its vision,' until 'the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being – and this we say is the Good' (understood as God by Ficino).[117] The simple but effective metaphor of coming out of the dark into the light of reason and the Good is one which is readily understood, more so, perhaps, than than some of Plato's more complex notions. The same metaphor is again emphasized in a later section.[118] Here, the progress from Cave to sunlight is stressed, and the key is said to be contemplation and education which directs the soul to what is best among realities. Plato's Cave is thus based on the symbolism of the Sun in the context of its analogy with the Good, and dependent upon the way in which, by its own light, it makes its own realm or self intelligible.[119]

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[116]This description also bears comparison with Michelangelo's *Slaves* from the Julius tomb, especially those known as 'The Dying Slave' and 'The Rebellious Slave,' (for which see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 1975, figs. 91 and 93).

[117]*Republic*, especially 517–518D.

[118]*Ibid.*, 532A–D.

[119]For further explanation and discussion of Plato's metaphor of the Cave and its links with light and Sun symbolism, see Plato, *Republic* (ed. Radice and Baldick), pp. 278–286; Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 503–520; J. E. Raven, 'Sun, Divided Line and Cave,' *Classical Quarterly*, new series, 3 (1), 1953, pp. 22–32; J. Ferguson, 'Sun, Line and Cave again,' *Classical Quarterly*, new series, 13 (2), 1963, pp. 188–193; J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1981, especially chapter 10, 'Understanding and the God: Sun, Line and Cave,' pp. 242–272.

Ficino's translation and commentary on the *Republic* places an emphasis on the combined Sun–Cave metaphor,[120] which is strengthened by his references to it elsewhere, such as in the *Theologia Platonica* where *Republic* 7 is specifically discussed.[121] Plato's Cave became a topical matter for discussion in the Renaissance, as shown by references in Ficino's letters to friends and associates, in particular the letter to the theologian Angiolieri, which incorporates Ficino's 'word for word' translation of Plato's text.[122] Ficino explains the allegory, commenting on its spiritual as well as educational aspects. He gives a clear image of the arrangement of the cave and demonstrates how man is able to escape the darkness of the Cave of ignorance and 'go forth from darkness into sunlight...rising from utter folly to the vision of brilliance.'[123] If, in Michelangelo's fresco, the Sun–Christ is depicted as Ficino's 'vision of brilliance,' then the Cave at the lower edge might also possess an association with *Republic* 6–7.

In the centre of the lower edge of Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgment*, a large Cave is clearly defined (fig. 115), usually assumed to be an analogy of Hell or perhaps Purgatory or Limbo.[124] Some figures peer from the gloom. A clearly human presence is suggested by the nude back view of a figure outlined by the central fire whose glow is seen in the depths (fig. 116). Outside the cave, to the viewer's left, are figures moving away, outwards through a breach in the cave and upwards towards the Sun–Christ (fig. 117).

This cave, then, might be considered as capable of possessing reference not

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[120]Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mysteries*, p. 89, says that Plato's metaphor of the Cave is related to ancient solar beliefs. For Ficino on the Cave, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 223, 384.

[121]*Theologia Platonica*, book 4G (ed. cit., p. 58), 6B (p. 83), 16A (p. 303).

[122]See Ficino, *Letters*, vol. 3, no. 26.

[123]*Ibid.*, p. 58.

[124]Authors who refer to the problem of the 'cave' or its positioning at the altar, but without suggesting an explanation, include Mariani (1964), Coughland (1966), Camesasca (1969), Wilde (1978), De Vecchi (1986), De Tolnay (*Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 43). Salvini curiously refers to the 'mouths' (plural) of Hell (*Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 132). Steinberg discusses the problem in greater depth and gives reasons why the explanations of 'Limbo' or 'Purgatory' appear inadequate ('Corner of *Last Judgment*,' p. 249f.).

only to the Christian Hell as depicted by Michelangelo, but also to Plato's Cave: this seems reasonable in terms of Michelangelo's interest in Plato. The figures close by the Cave are not being drawn into it, but rather coming out of it. Those who have been damned are not being pulled into this 'Cave of Hell,' but they are being propelled (on the right hand side of the fresco) in a completely different direction. The idea of figures 'coming out' of the Cave appears far more appropriate to Plato's Cave than to the Christian Hell. 'Hell' itself seems, in fact, hardly to be depicted in the fresco at all, since Charon and Minos, situated in the extreme lower right–hand corner are avowed, by both ancient writers and by Dante, to be situated at the *entrance* to Hell (figs. 99, 100).[125]

The placement of the cave over the altar, when perceived as the Cave of Hell, has long puzzled scholars. One explanation which may be proposed is based upon the argued interest of Michelangelo in Nicodemism and the Gospel of Nicodemus, which has already been discussed. The Gospel of Nicodemus embraces the theme of Sun–symbolism and comments concerning the light of truth at the time of the Resurrection. In addition, the second section of this 'gospel' concerns the visit of Christ to Hell where He erected a cross as a sign of Victory over Hell.[126] This may provide the reason for this placement at the altar since the altar would carry a freestanding cross in the centre (see fig. 118).[127] The cross would therefore be positioned so as to concur with the Gospel of Nicodemus:

> And so it was done, and the Lord set his cross in the midst of Hell, which is the sign of Victory; and it shall remain there forever.[128]

This would confirm the notion that the theme of the fresco is hope and salvation, as in John 3:17, as much as gloom and despair, and partly resolves the additional

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[125]See Graves, *Greek Myths*, vol. 1, pp. 120–125, 'Gods of the Underworld,' who ites sources in Homer, Virgil and Ovid; Dante, *Inferno* III, 76f. and V, 4f.

[126]Gospel of Nicodemus (ed. James), pp. 94–146.

[127]For details of the cross which would have been in use at the time, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 105.

[128]Gospel of Nicodemus (ed. James), p. 123f. See also Kim (ed.), *Gospel of Nicodemus*, p. 5, with comparative references to Christ's victory over death. See also the popular *Beneficio di Cristo*, (ed. Prelowski) p. 56 and cf. I Corinthians 15: 54–57.

problems incurred in the fresco as the result of the unusual orientation of the chapel. The depiction of Hell on the altar wall might appear to be inappropriate, even though the west wall was often employed for depictions of the Last Judgment, but this reading or interpretation renders it more acceptable.

The Nicodemist interpretation of the Cave and Christ's conquering of it does not necessarily contradict the idea of the Cave in Michelangelo's fresco as being also representative of the Cave of Plato, but is, rather, complementary. In terms of Christian Neoplatonism, the two concepts share the overriding theme of salvation through knowledge of the Good, equated with Christ and His sacrifice. In Platonic thought, men are freed from the Cave of ignorance by spiritual contemplation. Just as Christ conquers the darkness of Hell to set men free, so, according to the Platonists, reason conquers the darkness of ignorance, despair and spiritual death. There thus appears to be in Michelangelo's Cave, a synthesis of spiritual Platonic and Christian concepts which are mutually reinforcing and far more subtle than Medieval depictions of Hell's tortures. The darkness of Plato's Cave is equated with the Christian Hell, and men are freed by coming out into the light of the Sun–Deity.[129] This idea of Platonic 'Cave' symbolism has significantly already been discussed in the context of Michelangelo's frescoes for the Sistine ceiling. In a recent work by Chastel, it is observed that the figures of the ancestors of Christ in the lunettes on Michelangelo's ceiling are 'reminiscent of the dwellers in the Cave of Plato's *Republic*.' This interpretation seems appropriate for those who lived prior to Christ, but it seems strange that the writer did not turn to consider the actual cave over the altar in the same context.[130]

The Neoplatonic interpretation of Sun–symbolism and cosmology in the

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[129]It is interesting to consider other representations of caves in Christian iconography which might have been influenced by similar themes, such as the Cave of the Nativity (more commonly depicted as such in the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church) and the Cave of the Entombment. In both cases, Christ emerges from the Cave for the Salvation of mankind from ignorance and darkness.

[130]Chastel et al, *Sistine Chapel*, p. 172. For other comment on the importance of Plato's Cave metaphor during the Renaissance, see D. Summers, *The Judgment of Sense. Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 40–41, 76, 264.

Last Judgment fresco, which can be related to *Republic* 6, may thus lead to the conclusion that Cave over the altar really represents Plato's Cave (*Republic* 7). Conversely, it might be argued that the presence of a Cave in the work, corresponding to *Republic* 7, confirms the idea that depiction of the Sun–Christ in a circular format is related to Ficino's interpretation of Plato's *Republic* 6 – an argument notable for its perfect circularity. Again, as elsewhere in this hypothesis, no single framework appears necessarily to dominate Michelangelo's interpretation, but the final synthesis is based on an elaborate merging of a number of current concepts.[131]

vi) Other Philosophical Sources; the Hermetic writings

While Ficino's writings in his capacity as the leader of the Platonic Academy in Florence are clearly paramount as a source for Platonic cosmology and the Christianized view of Plato's Sun–Deity analogy, other philosophical writings, while not so directly linked to Michelangelo, demonstrate the ubiquitous nature of the theme in philosophical as well as literary and theological writings of the period. For example, the writings of Pico della Mirandola, Ficino's colleague, include similar themes. The idea of the Sun–Deity analogy occurs in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), where he refers to 'the true Apollo.'[132] The idea of Christ as Sun–symbol also reappears in Pico's *Heptaplus*, where it is a major theme. Waddington comments on the 'Christocentric' nature of the *Heptaplus*, and then shows how, owing to a numerological mid–point structuring, it is, in fact Sun–centred.[133] 'Nothing represents the Messiah to us more fittingly than the

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[131]This interpretation which relates to the contrasts between the darkened cave and the bright vision above is likely to be reinforced when the cleaning of the fresco presently being undertaken is completed. While the upper areas are almost certain to have their former brightness revealed, the lower areas should remain relatively dark since contemporary reports describe them as such (Letter of Anton Francesco Doni, quoted by Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 164).

[132]Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, in Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, especially pp. 153, 155; cf also Cassirer, Kristeller and Randall, *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 234–236, and Robb, *Neoplatonism*, p. 60f.

[133]R. B. Waddington, 'The sun at center: structure as meaning in Pico della Mirandola's *Heptaplus*,' *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 3, 1973, pp.

sun,' writes Pico, and he shows that the sun is the image of Christ by referring to Plato's *Republic*.[134] It is also of interest that a letter of Pico's contains discussion of Plato's metaphor of the Cave, showing how well known this passage was.[135]

The writings of other Renaissance philosophers also demonstrate the recurrence of the same symbols. The work of Cristoforo Landino has already been discussed in the previous chapter but the sun image and circular cosmology is also examined by Leone Ebreo (1460–1521), Pomponazzi (1462–1525) and later writers like Bernardino Telesio (1509–88) and Patrizi (1529–97).[136] Similar Platonic themes recur in the writings of Renaissance philosophers originating north of the Alps, like Cusanus (1401–64), Erasmus (1466–1536) and even Colet (1467–1519) and More (1478–1535) in England, showing an interest in Platonic themes and the analogy of 'the Divine Sun,' which was stimulated even further by increasing contact with Italy.[137] At the very end of the sixteenth century, the same imagery was still being used by Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) and Kepler (1571–1630), clearly demonstrating the extent to which such ideas were entrenched.[138] These writers were, like Ficino and Pico before them, and also Copernicus himself, very much influenced also by the Hermetic writings and the Cabala.

In many of his writings, Ficino refers to the sources from which he has

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[134]See *ibid.*, especially pp. 78–79. Waddington's study on Sun–symbolism in Milton discusses the continuing influence and popularity of similar themes in the following century (Waddington, 'Here comes the Son').

[135]Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 113.

[136]For examples, see respectively, Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 198–199, 275, 311–312, and Kristeller, *Eight Renaissance Philosophers*, pp. 120–121.

[137]See Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 3–23, 149–162, 277–293, 296–309; also J. B. Gleason, 'Sun–worship in More's *Utopia*,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 433–446. Cusanus will be more properly dealt with in the next chapter.

[138]For Campanella, see especially his *City of the Sun*, (ed. cit.), and Fallico, *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 338–378. For Bruno, *ibid.*, pp. 339–423; and, more especially, Yates, *Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, where Bruno's debt to Ficino is examined. For the later influence of Ficinian and Hermetic solar mysticism on Kepler (1571–1630), see Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, part 4, and below, chapter 8, 'Scientific Sources.'

developed his cosmology, and Plato, Plotinus, Augustine and Pseudo–Dionysius feature prominently. But he often refers also to the writings of the ancients, Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster and the Orphic hymns and he specifically refers to these sources in *De Sole*, especially chapter 6: 'The Sun is the Eternal Eye which sees everything, the supreme heavenly light which rules over the things of the sky and of the world. It guides and rules the harmonious course of the world, since it is the Lord of the Universe...'.[139] Before moving on to the discussion of scientific cosmology in the sixteenth century, this further aspect of Ficino's work requires discussion – namely his translations and interpretations of the so–called Hermetic writings, which are also concerned with the cosmological view of the universe and emphasize the sun as a symbol of the Deity.[140] While a direct influence on Michelangelo is less certain, brief examination of the Hermetic writings is relevant because of their popularity at the time as well as their contribution to Neoplatonic thought. Moreover, special interest was shown in these writings by Giles of Viterbo, the probable theological adviser for the Sistine ceiling, which suggests a connection with Michelangelo. Giles of Viterbo accumulated texts on the Hermetic writings which were published by his 'disciple' Johannes Widmanstadt.[141] Likewise, the Cabalistic writings, although not usually proposed as influential upon Michelangelo, are generally accepted as having played an important role during the Renaissance, especially, for example, in the philosophy of Pico della Mirandola and the work of Leonardo da Vinci.[142]

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[139]Ficino, *De Sole*, p. 126f. He also quotes Iamblichus, 'All the good we have, we have from the Sun,' (*ibid.*, p. 127) and shows how 'very many Platonists place the soul of the World in the Sun,' (p. 128, cf. chapter 9 on pp. 129–130). Ficino also acknowledges the Hermetic writings as his sources elsewhere; for example, *De Amore*, p. 37, and *Philebus Commentary* (Allen, *Philebus*, pp. 180, 246).

[140]For the influence of these ancient writings on Ficino and his circle, see Robb, *Neoplatonism*, p. 48f; Kristeller, *Ficino*, p. 25f.; *idem.*, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, p. 98; Allen, *Platonism of Ficino*, p. 35. Copernicus' knowledge of the Hermetic writings (see opening quotation of chapter 1, above) should especially be born in mind.

[141]See F. Secret, 'Le Soleil chez les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 211–240, especially p. 215.

[142]For an examination of the influence of the Cabala, which space does not permit here, see J. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala*, New York: Kennikat, 1965; Secret, 'Le Soleil chez les Kabbalistes Chrétiens,'; and R.

The writings of Hermes Trismegistus (now known to be of the first or second century A D) were believed by Ficino and his circle to have been written by a pre–Christian Egyptian priest, a contemporary of Moses.[143] As such, they were viewed as forerunners of Plato and precursory to Christian thought, especially as source for the concept of the relationship between Man and Cosmos.[144] They were highly regarded in the Middle Ages and even more so during the Renaissance, which is demonstrated by the way in which portraits of Trismegistus occur in Christian context, for example at Siena Cathedral (fig. 119).

At the request of Cosimo de' Medici, Ficino actually translated all of the Hermetic writings before those of Plato, and these were widely circulated from 1463. Regarded almost as source for Plato, these transcripts became Ficino's most frequently published work.[145] Ficino's interest in the magical aspects of these writings has received some attention, as has the importance of cosmology and Sun–symbolism in the Hermetic writings as a source for Ficino's use of similar themes.[146] The links between Renaissance thought and Eastern magic as well as Christian cosmology and symbolism are clearly demonstrated in Ficino's writings, which also embrace discussion of astrology and medicine.[147]

In view of the tentative nature of the Hermetic writings as a direct source

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Schrivano, 'Platonism and Cabalistic elements in the Hebrew culture of Renaissance Italy,' in Eisenbichler and Pugliese, *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*,' pp. 123–139. For the popularity and influence of the Hermetic writings and the Cabala on artists like Leonardo, see V. P. Zoubov, 'Le Soleil dans L'oeuvre scientifique de Léonard de Vinci,' in Université de Bruxelles, pp. 179–198; and Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 179–180, 260–251 and 449.

[143]Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 398; Kristeller, *Facets of the Renaissance*, pp. 112–113.

[144]See also, F. A. Yates, 'The Hermetic Tradition and Renaissance Science,' in C. A. Singleton, *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967, pp. 255–274; and Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, especially pp. 19–24; also I. Merkel and A. G. Debus (eds.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance. Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*. Washington: Folger, 1988, section 2, 'Magic, Philosophy and Science.'

[145]Ficino, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 21.

[146]Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 81f.

[147]E. Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance, The Zodiac of Life*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, especially pp. 58–67 ('Neoplatonism and Hermeticism').

for Michelangelo, a detailed examination of the Sun–symbolism and cosmology in these writings will not be necessary. But, as a major source for Ficino and because of their widespread availability during the sixteenth century, cursory examination of the major Hermetic writings will serve to confirm the prevalence of the themes.[148]

The idea of light and the sun as an analogy with the Deity recurs often, and especially in the so–called *Poimandres* and *Picatrix*.[149] For example, Light is an important symbol to be used in the account of the Creation of the universe.[150] Cosmology is a major theme of the *Discourse* of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius, and is particularly concerned with an explanation of the movement in the cosmos. This is perceived as circular movement around a point and it is related to the Hermetic idea that the earth moves because it is alive.[151] It appears to be impossible, states the writer, that a thing which causes movement should be moved together with the thing it moves, but the unmoved God may be perceived as possessing mobility as well: '...And in this way it is possible to hold that God also moves within himself, though God like eternity is motionless; for the movement of God, being made stable by his greatness, is no movement, inasmuch as his greatness is necessarily motionless....It moves in absolute stability and its stability moves within it.'[152] Discussion continues on the eternal circular movement of the cosmos 'which has had no beginning, and will have no end....Such is the nature of circular movement; all points in the circle are so linked together.' But Hermes bids his hearers to 'keep these divine mysteries hidden in your hearts and

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[148]See W. Scott (ed. and trans.), *Hermetica. The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, London: Dawson, 1968, especially vol. 1. which has a useful explanatory introduction.

[149]*Hermetica* (ed. cit.) Libellus 1, pp. 115–133 (compare with Genesis and the Apocalypse); Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, especially pp. 23–28, 49f., and Garin, *Astrology*, chapter 2.

[150]*Hermetica*, pp. 117f, 125f, 146 and 189. For discussion of the concepts of the beginning of time and space, pp. 311–321.

[151]See *Hermetica*, pp. 135, 137, 195, 235. It is argued that nothing is motionless, 'not even the earth,' since immobility suggests idleness, p. 235. See Yates, *Art of Memory*, p. 310.

[152]*Hermetica*, pp. 351–353.

cover them with a veil of silence.'[153] Light symbolism in general is also important in the arrangement of the universe, as God is equated with the Good,[154] which is 'the archtypal light; and Mind and Truth are, so to speak, emitted by that Light.'[155]

The specific analogy with the Sun is also used on several occasions: 'If you wish to see Him, think on the Sun, think on the course of the Moon, think on the order of the stars. Who is it that maintains that order? The Sun is the greatest of the gods in Heaven, as to their King and overlord...and yet this mighty god, greater than earth and sea, submits to have smaller stars circling above him...'[156] These descriptions appear as an obvious source for Ficino and, in turn, as a possible influence on the thought behind Michelangelo's fresco. The idea that 'it is God that is the author of all and encompasses all and knits all things together' is strongly reminiscent of Ficino's 'knot and bond of the universe,' quoted above, and further writings, in the main derived from Plato's *Timaeus* (but thought by Ficino and the Platonists to be precursory), also relate very closely to Ficino's thoughts on the immortality of the soul and life after death.[157] Also noteworthy is the Hermetic use of symbols, numerology and talismans, which was adopted by Ficino.[158] Among these, the most significant for the present argument is the use of the Apollo image which consisted of a Sun–king with a crown. This was used,

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[153]*Hermetica*, p. 359. The deliberate combination of mobility and immobility is suggestive of source material for the ambiguous pose of Michelangelo's Christ. The attitude towards secretiveness attached to divine revelations has also been mentined in connection with the fresco (see Preface, above).

[154]*Ibid.*, pp. 141, 168f.

[155]*Ibid.*, pp. 141–3. The observation that 'Man's soul is illumined by rays of light from God' (p. 271) bears a clear resemblance to Ficino's thought, quoted above, as also does the idea of man's escape from the darkness of error into light (p. 371).

[156]See *ibid.*, p. 159, also pp. 213, 267–268, 283f. God is described 'stationed in the midst of the Kosmos,' and as the King of the Universe, pp. 278–281, 455.

[157]See especially pp. 217, 231, and 239–247, regarding the immortality of the soul, and p. 369 on punishment after death. These and other concepts dealt with are succinctly summed up on pp. 427–433. See also Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 36–37, 153–156 and 172 for Sun–symbolism in the *Hermetica*. The influence on Ficino of these writings is deserving of closer scrutiny.

[158]Yates, 'Hermetic Tradition,' (in Singleton), pp. 258–259; *idem*, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 71f.

according to the *Picatrix*, as a talisman 'to enable a king to overcome all other kings,' again suggesting the appropriateness of the analogy between the ancient Sun–god and Christ, the King of Kings.[159]

The possible influence of these texts, alongside Ficino's other commentaries and translations, clearly deserves further consideration for the way in which they provide evidence for the prevalence of an interest in this type of cosmology, as well as for Sun–symbolism itself. The Hermetic tradition was popularised through Ficino's works, and this continued well into the sixteenth century.[160] The influence of these 'magical writings' and of Ficino's solar mysticism is also quite clear on even later philosophers like Giordano Bruno and Campanella, who are very important for cosmological and astronomical discussion towards the end of the sixteenth century in Italy.[161] The great influence of Ficino's interpretation of Sun–symbolism in the Hermetic writings on Bruno and Campanella in the late sixteenth century is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it does undoubtedly demonstrate that, if the philosphy was still current and available to those men at the end of the sixteenth century, it was surely known and accessible to Michelangelo in the middle period of that century and there is thus good cause to consider the *Hermetica* as influential on the thought of the artist.[162]

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[159]*Ibid.*, p. 71.

[160]Yates, *Art of Memory*, especially pp. 138–139 and 151–153, deals with the later influence of sun mysticism and magic and shows how far Neoplatonic and Hermetic thought has to be taken into account as contributory to the heliocentric revolution.

[161]See Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, especially chapter 20, and *idem*, *Art of Memory*, pp. 228 and 297f. Also L. Firpo, 'La cité ideale de Campanella et le Culte de Soleil,' P–H. Michel, 'Le Soleil, le Temps et l'Espace: Intuitions Cosmologiques et Images Poétiques de Giordano Bruno,' and M. Dynnik, 'L'homme, le Soleil et le Cosmos dans la Philosophie de Giordano Bruno,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 325–340, 397–414 and 415–432 respectively. Hermetic influence, combined with Ficino's Neoplatonism, has also been claimed as an influence on Kepler and even Newton (Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, part 4; P. Thuillier, 'Isaac Newton. Un alchémiste pas comme les autres,' *La Recherche*, 20 (212), 1989, pp. 876– 886).

[162]The influence of Neoplatonic and Hermetic writings on contemporary scientific thought will be dealt with in the next chapter. The continuation of the Hermetic tradition, later combined with so–called Rosicrucian ideas, is dealt with by Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 407–414, 440–447. Note Bruno's association of heliocentricity with solar magic and the idea of the terrestrial movement being founded on the Hermetic concept that the earth moves because it is alive.

vii) Christian Neoplatonism

It becomes increasingly evident that a case may be put forward for Ficino's interpretation of Platonic, and also perhaps Hermetic, writings as a contributory source for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment.* Because of the way in which Ficino combines Platonic and Christian concepts in his view of the Good, personified as the Deity and analogized to the sun, Neoplatonic philosophy serves to reinforce the Christian concept of the analogy between Christ and the sun. Christian thought and Neoplatonic philosophy, acknowledged as two forceful influences in the life and work of Michelangelo, apparently come together in his interpretation of the Last Judgment, and Neoplatonism actually reinforces the religious and Dantean sources available to Michelangelo for the depiction of the Sun–Christ in a circular cosmological framework. The concept of the Sun–Christ in the centre of a circular cosmology permeates sixteenth–century religious thought and is common to Michelangelo's accepted sources of Ficino and Dante, as well as corresponding very neatly to his *Last Judgment* fresco. As a late work, Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* has largely been viewed as a predominantly religiously inspired work, a major line of interpretation of Michelangelo's works being that his early works were largely inspired by Neoplatonism, his late works by religious or Catholic sentiment. This view appears far too simplistic. As has been shown, the essentially Christian nature of Renaissance Neoplatonism appears to be expressed in the *Last Judgment* fresco, which is evident in many realms, from the Sun–symbol of Christ to individual items, like the Cave, which may be read as a synthesis in the same way.

This interpretation underlies a whole new approach to the study of Michelangelo's late works which have often been simplistically categorized as the product of the Counter–Reformation or some personal religious 'transformation.'[163]

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[163]See, for example, De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 94. He comments that 'Michelangelo's early Platonism and late Christianity are not irreconcilable,' and 'Michelangelo's Platonism can be considered a prelude to his later Christianity,' but this in itself implies the that the two aspects are broadly related rather than inextricably linked. (This problem will be discussed further in chapter 10).

It appears that Neoplatonism is a theme which, far from being dismissed or rejected by the ageing master, acted as a lifelong influence and continued to be in his thoughts and represented in his works. It was, at the same time, and owing to his increasing involvement in religion, integrated more and more into Christian thought. To Michelangelo as to Ficino, Neoplatonism was not neopaganism. From St Augustine and Dionysius onwards (and especially for those of the Italian Renaissance), it was the avowed intention of the Neoplatonists to combine and integrate Platonic thought with Christianity. The Christianizing of Plato's writings is exactly what aroused interest in the sixteenth century, and the synthesis of Platonic and Christian thought is exactly what is reflected in the iconography of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. These two currents in Michelangelo's thinking should thus not be split into two distinct phases, but seen as complementary influences throughout his working career of which the *Last Judgment* could be viewed as the culmination.

The sources which have been dealt with thus far and which demonstrate the importance of Sun–symbolism and cosmology as themes of discussion on the Renaissance are all to be found among the generally accepted sources for Michelangelo. It is important to consider at this point, however, that the different sources are not identical in detail and Ficino often refers to either four or five cosmic areas or circles; Plato describes eight and Dante nine (fig. 94).[164] As we shall see, Copernicus' basic scheme (fig. 2) contains at least seven circles. But it is the main idea of the Sun as Deity at the centre of the circular universe which is of primary concern in the proposed source material, where a correlation with Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is being sought. The circularity of Michelangelo's design, which seems to result from a synthesis of these views is of the essence, rather than a precise correspondence with the number of circles of any particular scheme.[165] In addition, the examination of Platonic and philosophical sources,

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[164]See Plato, *Republic* (ed. Radice), Appendix, p. 402 with diagram, p. 405. Compare Dante, *Paradiso* (ed. Mandelbaum), p. 305.

[165]While chapter 8 will provide more detailed consideration of Copernicus' scheme, this problem of correlation will also be further discussed in chapter 9,

alongside the theological and literary or Dantean sources for Sun–symbolism and circular cosmology, should not be construed as the offering of *alternative* source material for Michelangelo's interpretation and composition of the Last Judgment. These views of the Deity as Sun, whether taken from the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, Dante, Plato or Ficino, are to be regarded, at the time of the Renaissance, as different aspects of one and the same thing. At this stage of the hypothesis, the fresco has been interpreted as illustrative or suggestive of the Gospel of St John, of Dante's *Divina Commedia* and of Plato's *Republic* 6 and 7, but these are all inextricably linked within the context of Renaissance man's attempt to explain the universe in which he lived and the God who created it. Early Neoplatonism influenced the writer of the Gospel of John as well as Dante. Dante, in turn, clearly influenced later Renaissance writers like Ficino. For the Renaissance, the links between cosmology and theology, which were expressed in literature as well as philosophy, were all part of the same discipline, and mutually reinforcing as the exegesis of God's truth. The way in which actual scientific theory fitted into this interdisciplinary framework in the Renaissance, and whether Copernicus himself might have been influenced by similar sources, remains to be discussed. While recognized sources for Michelangelo have been reconsidered from a new point of view so far in the present hypothesis, the scientific material of the works of Copernicus and his predecessors is now to be newly proposed as a definite field of influence, which has been entirely unexplored. As we shall see, Neoplatonism and Christian belief acted as major influences on Copernicus, and in fact contributed to his scientific thinking and his formulation of the heliocentric view of the universe.

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below.

Chapter 8

Scientific Sources

> So we find underlying this ordination [the heliocentric system] an admirable symmetry in the Universe and a clear bond of harmony in the motion and magnitude of the spheres such as can be discovered in no other wise.... So great is this divine work of the Great and Noble Creator.
>
> Nicholas Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium.*[1]

In the tenth chapter of his introductory first book of *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, Copernicus demonstrates, in one breath as it were, both his affinity with Neoplatonic concepts of perfection, symmetry and harmony and his acknowledgment of the Christian God. The expression of Platonic notions, as well as specific references to Plato in Copernicus' work, demonstrates the influence on Copernicus of the same Renaissance background and sixteenth-century currents of thought which also informed the thinking of Michelangelo.

i) The Importance of Copernicus

It is curious that general histories of the Renaissance period usually only afford a line or two – at most half a page – to the assessment of Copernicus' theory.[2] Considering the eventual impact of the heliocentric theory on philosophy, religion and general world view, not to mention astronomy, it seems extraordinary that so little discussion of it takes place in books of general or cultural history. Perhaps this marks a reluctance on the part of cultural historians to deal with a subject which also involves complex scientific and mathematical

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[1]See Nicholas Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, Nuremberg, 1543, facsimile edition (ed. J. Dobrzycki), London: Macmillan, 1978, p. 22. (This edition will be used throughout). Translation taken from Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, p. 180.

[2]See comment by Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 9–10.

discussion.[3] Conversely, many historians of science tend to analyze and discuss Copernicus' achievement on a scientific basis, without delving too deeply into his importance in the context of Renaissance humanist and Neoplatonic learning or in the upheaval of the Renaissance in general.[4]

Although the core of the Copernican revolution was the transformation of mathematical astronomy, it embraced conceptual changes in cosmology, physics, philosophy and religion as well. Simply put, the importance of Copernicus' heliocentric theory of the universe lies in the fact that it eventually displaced the Medieval view of the universe in which the earth was situated in the central, most significant position, surrounded by a series of immovable spheres which supported the heavenly bodies and the celestial regions. By contrast, according to Copernicus' heliocentric theory, the earth was simply one of a number of planets which revolved in circular orbits around the sun, now assumed to be at the central point of the universe.[5] The change in world view which stemmed from Copernicus' heliocentric theory was to have enormous implications for theology

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[3]See, for example, H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 2 vols. London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1957, vol. 1, pp. 432 and 692; M. Dunan (ed.), *Larousse Encyclopedia of Moder History from 1500 to the Present Day*, London: Hamlyn, 1984, pp. 27, 28. For works on the Renaissance itself: S. Lucas, *The Renaissance and the Reformation*, New York: Harper and Row, 1960, pp. 183 and 370–371; A. J. Grant, *A History of Europe. 1494–1610*, London: Methuen, 1964, p. 539; J. H. Plumb (ed.), *The Horizon Book of the Renaissance*, London: Collins, 1961, p. 185; V. H. H. Green, *Renaissance and Reformation*, London: Arnold, 1972, pp. 50–51.

[4]For example, S. P. Mizwa, *Nicholas Copernicus*, Washington: Kennikat, 1943, and F. Hoyle, *Nicholas Copernicus: an Essay on his Life and Work*, London: Heinemann, 1973 where little attention is paid to the cultural context. A recent exception which treats Copernicus' work within a wider context is F. Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World. Copernicus and Kepler*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.

[5]These issues will be dealt with further below. Modern scientific theory demonstrates, of course, that the sun lies at one epicentre of the elliptic orbits of the planets which comprise the solar system, not at the centre of the universe. The sun is just one of a hundred thousand million (100,000,000,000) stars in our galaxy, which is, in turn, one of over one billion (1,000,000,000,000) galaxies in the universe, which is a–centric, presently expanding and infinite. For modern scientific details, see, for example, W. H. Smart, *Spherical Astronomy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, p. 37f., and Misner, Thorne and Wheeler, *Gravitation*, pp. 752–762, 'A Brief History of Cosmology.' See also, R. Berendzen, 'From Geocentric to Heliocentric to Galactocentric to Acentric' in A. Beer and K. Strand, *Copernicus, Yesterday and Today*, in *Vistas in Astronomy*, 17, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1975, pp. 65–81, for the change in conception of the universe.

and philosophy, mainly because of the way in which it altered the implicit relationship between Man and God and because of the way in which it did, eventually, impinge onto all areas of cultural thought.

ii) De Tolnay, Copernicus and Michelangelo

In the course of his analysis of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, De Tolnay did attempt to consider the relevance of Copernicus' heliocentric theory within this type of wider, cultural framework by considering its possible influence on Michelangelo's fresco. As has already been discussed, he discounted the possibility because Michelangelo, at the time of the fresco's creation,

> could not have known Copernicus' book [*De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*] which was published in 1543, at least seven years after Michelangelo had conceived his fresco.[6]

Because the book's date of publication post–dated the completion and unveiling of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in 1541, strictly speaking De Tolnay was correct: it would have been impossible for Michelangelo to have read *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* in its published form either before or during his work on the fresco. In fact, since Kuhn points out that Copernicus had made the book unreadable to 'all but the erudite astronomers of the day,' and Koestler characterises *De Revolutionibus* as 'the book that nobody read,'[7] it would probably have been unlikely for Michelangelo to have read the complete work, even if it had already been published.

However, as Koestler also points out, it was not necessary (either then or now) for Copernicus' detailed thesis to be read in order to grasp the heliocentric idea. The astronomical thesis of *De Revolutionibus*, including the observational data, is extremely complex, even 'confused,'[8] but its enormous impact over the

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[6]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol 5, p. 49.

[7]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, p. 185; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 194f.

[8]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 194–195. Because of its technical content, Michelangelo would probably have been unable to read it at any stage, but the main themes of the theory are easily grasped. Copernicus discusses the earth as

succeeding centuries is to be explained by the fact that the details were less important than the underlying heliocentric idea. Contrary to what De Tolnay implies, reading *Revolutions* and hearing about heliocentricity were (and still are) two very different things. It was not necessary for anyone to read *De Revolutionibus* in order to grasp the basic concept of a moving earth rotating about a stationary sun. It would, of course, be necessary for the idea to be in circulation. As will be shown, not only did the heliocentric idea originate well before the Renaissance, in the midst of an increasing amount of cosmological speculation, but Copernicus' own ideas were formulated, discussed and even circulated well before the publishing of *De Revolutionibus* in 1543. Nor were such ideas always regarded as heretical by the Catholic Church as is sometimes implied.[9]

iii) The waning of Medieval cosmology and the revival of ancient concepts

By the era of the Renaissance, the Medieval concept that the earth was flat, with the land mass occupying the centre, edged by water and covered by the Dome of Heaven had been questioned for some time. This cosmology, based on interpretations by men like Cosmas and Lactantius,[10] was losing ground, especially in the west. Although this crude idea probably continued throughout the period in the minds of a large proportion of the masses, it did not survive amongst educated scholars, who had thought of the earth as a sphere for some time.[11] The

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spherical, the motions of the heavenly bodies (uniform, eternal and circular), the position of the earth in the system and the immensity of the heavens, in addition to the core idea of the sun as immobile in the centre of the known universe. Extensive technical and astronomical data is included.

[9]See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 122; Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' p. 49 (Christ is described as 'Sunlike, Copernican' as Steinberg argues that the fresco contains heretical ideas, see above, chapter 4). Thus the erroneous idea that the Catholic Church immediately condemned and persecuted Copernicus himself still occurs. The Catholic Church decree that the idea of the sun as central and immobile was 'foolish and absurd, philosophically false and formally heretical' did not follow until 1616, as mentioned.

[10]See chapter 3, section 1, above.

[11]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 102–106, 'The Age of Double–Think'; S. Painter, *A History of the Middle Ages*, London: Macmillan, 1968, p. 435. As was mentioned in chapter 3, the conviction that the earth was spherical stemmed from the

celestial regions, too, were regarded as spherical, consisting of a series of concentric spheres which revolved around the earth and carried the stars and planets. It is thus erroneous to suppose that the earth was considered flat until the voyages of discovery by Columbus and others from 1492. Heniger, in a consideration of Renaissance views of the world, demonstrates clearly, through Medieval and Renaissance diagrams of the universe, that cosmological speculation enjoyed certain popularity in the fifteenth century – in the absence of dictated authority by the church.[12]

The generally held view of the universe was based, in the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance, on Aristotle and Ptolemy as much as on scriptural sources. Since Gerbert, the astronomer and mathematician, elected Pope in 999, had discussed the spherical earth and introduced the notion of its representation by a globe, variations on the spherical geocentric theory had come under consideration and the Church and the scholastic movement had even contributed to this debate.[13]

By the time of the Renaissance, the heliocentric theory was also under discussion. It had, as mentioned above, been considered by Dante who clearly believed in the concept of the spherical universe, and it was among the various alternative theories regarding the ordering and composition of the universe which had been proposed. This discussion could well have arisen from the difficulties attached to combining the Biblical view of the cosmos (with Heaven above and

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observation of phenomena such as the shadow of the earth on the moon during an eclipse, the alteration of position of stars as travellers move south and the fact that land not visible from a ship at sea is visible from the top of the mast (conversely, from the land, a ship goes out of sight before its mast). Discussion surrounding heliocentricity followed soon after the voyages of discovery, since heliocentricity seemed the logical next step after the confirmation of the sphericity of the earth. In addition, although it might appear difficult to consider the earth's motion, this perhaps seemed more probable than the idea of the rotation of the rest of the entire universe. These phenomena are summarised by Copernicus in *Revolutions*, book 1, chapter 2 (ed. cit., p. 8).

[12]Heninger, *Cosmographical Glass*, especially pp. xv–xvi, and R. J. M. Olson, 'Renaissance Representations of Comets and Pre–telescopic Astronomy,' *Art Journal*, Fall 1984, pp. 217–223.

[13]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 95; Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 105–106.

Hell beneath the earth's surface) with a world now known to be spherical.[14] With Hell situated beneath the earth's surface but with a spherical earth as the centre of the universe, the end result was virtually 'haidocentric' (or 'diabolocentric').[15] On the one hand this fitted in with the religious concept of the universe as a 'golden apple with a rotten core,' but it appeared incongruous and quite unacceptable to have the whole of creation and the celestial spheres rotating around Hell. The unease which this created has already been demonstrated in the discussion on Dante since, having placed Hell below in the centre of the earth, he felt forced to introduce a second 'point' (symbolic of God) around which the Heavens revolved, in order to avoid this problem (figs. 94, 95).[16]

It is important to remember that, prior to the Renaissance, the heliocentric universe had also been considered by ancient philosophers. Previous proponents of the idea, both amongst the ancient Pythagoreans and Platonists as well as amongst fifteenth–century Italian and German astronomers, were duly acknowledged by Copernicus in his writings.[17] Copernicus recognized that the heliocentric idea had originated in antiquity and had been dimly kept alive through the intervening centuries. In his writings, he quotes ancient sources as a means of giving increased credibility to his theory, and in the preface to *Revolutions* he explains how, being dissatisfied with the complexities and inconsistencies of the accepted Ptolemaic and Aristotelian system, he held a

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[14]Belief that the earth was spherical was reflected in contemporary art by the fifteenth century. The slight curve in the landscape backgrounds of Piero dell Francesca's *Triumphs of Federigo da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza*, c. 1470, and Antonio del Pollaiuolo's *Martydom of St. Sebastian*, 1475 (see Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, pp. 143, 261), have already been cited as examples.

[15]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 99; Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being*, p. 102.

[16]Dante, *Paradiso* XXVIII; see above, chapter 6.

[17]See especially Copernicus' Preface which was published with *Revolutions*, reproduced by Dobrzycki (ed.), *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, pp. 3–6, and Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 137–143. See also *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 12, 25, 122, 129, 144, for further acknowledgement by Copernicus of his predecessors. Copernicus' preface should not be confused with the extra preface to *Revolutions*, added later by the publisher Osiander, and probably without Copernicus' approval. It presented the book as hypothesis rather than fact, the proable motive being to forestall opposition (Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 169–174).

conviction that the solution to the composition and workings of the universe should be simple and harmonious.[18] Thus, as a Neoplatonist, he set out to consider whether the ancient philosophers might have proposed more systematic solutions to the problem of the universe. This led him, as he states,[19] to search the ancient authors and classical writings to look for alternative, orderly solutions. He discovered references to the moving earth in Cicero and Plutarch,[20] who in turn were discussing the work of ancient Pythagorean and Platonic astronomers; Hicetas, Philolaus the Pythagorean (Plato's own teacher), Heraclides of Pontus and Ecphantus the Pythagorean.[21] Copernicus' purposeful searching of the ancient authors to stimulate and corroborate his own ideas demonstrates his Renaissance interest in classical learning and its revival which was part of a general tendency of the time.

In his discussion Copernicus also included reference to Aristarchus of Samos,[22] whose theory went furthest of all the ancients since he progressed from the discussion of the moving earth to the placement of a static sun in the centre of the universe. The sources into which Copernicus delved to find this information (Cicero and Plutarch) would have been as easily available to Michelangelo in

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[18]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 4.

[19]*Ibid*: 'I undertook the task of rereading the works of all the philosophers which I could obtain to learn whether any had ever proposed other motions of the universe's spheres.' (See also extract in Appendix IV).

[20]For references to Cicero and Plutarch, see Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 4, 12 and 342–349 *passim*. See also E. Rybka, 'The Influence of the Cracow Intellectual Climate at the end of the Fifteenth Century upon the Origin of the Heliocentric System,' *Vistas in Astronomy*, 9, 1967, pp. 165–169, especially p. 168 for Copernicus' access to these.

[21]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 4–5. For further information on these ancient authors, see Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, pp. 42–43; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 43–50; A. Armitage, *Sun, Stand thou Still: The Life and Work of Copernicus the Astronomer*, London: Sigma, 1947, pp. 38–45; C. A. Russell, *The Background to Copernicus*, Bletchley: Open University Press, 1972, p. 28–31; M. K. Munitz (ed.), *Theories of the Universe from Babylonian Myth to Modern Science*, Illinois: Free Press, 1957.

[22]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 25, 122, 144. For Aristarchus of Samos, see T. L. Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos, the Ancient Copernicus*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1913. Compare, Russell, *Background to Copernicus*, p. 43, who states incorrectly that Copernicus did not mention Aristarchus and was probably unaware of his work.

Rome as to Copernicus in Poland, especially these most important references to Aristarchus of Samos. It is particularly noteworthy that Aristarchus' theories are mentioned by Vitruvius in his *Ten Books of Architecture*, a text with which Michelangelo was undoubtedly familiar.[23]

iv) Renaissance predecessors of Copernicus

The main scientific problem of the Renaissance was Astronomy, and as far as Copernicus' immediate Renaissance predecessors are concerned, there is evidence that several thinkers had tackled the problem of the spherical geocentric cosmos. In spite of the ancient thinkers, the question of whether it was the earth, or the sun and sphere of stars, which was in motion had been dismissed in the Middle Ages for basically observational reasons,[24] but it did come under discussion again well before Copernicus, as early as the fourteenth century. The philosopher, Jean Buridan (1297–1358)[25] discussed the concept of relative motion, which was fundamental to a consideration of whether the earth or the other celestial bodies (sun, stars and planets) were in motion, and to Copernicus' own hypothesis. Buridan related this to the idea of a ship moving out from harbour in which case it is the shore which appears to recede.[26] Although the idea that the whole huge

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[23]Vitruvius refers to Aristarchus in his section on Astronomy, *Ten Books of Architecture*, (ed. M. H. Morgan) New York: Dover, 1960, book 9, chapter 2, p. 263. Vitruvius's book was known to Copernicus (Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 350) and also to Michelangelo (Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, p. 14).

[24]Arguments tending towards the rejection of the moving earth included the evidence of scripture and the concept of Man as 'central' to the universe. Naked–eye observation from the earth itself appears to confirm that it remains stationary while the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, planets and stars) rotate around it. There was no evidence that 'flying' objects like birds or clouds might be 'left behind' by a moving earth: there was no evidence of alteration in the positions of stars which would be expected if the earth were in motion. Stellar parallax was not observed until 1838, by Bessel. (See H. Butterfield, *Origins of Modern Science*, London: Bell, 1958, pp. 58–60). These appear to be the reasons why the ancient ideas concerning the motion of the earth never became generally accepted, although discussion had taken place, for example, by Dante (*De Aqua et Terra*).

[25]For Buridan, see J. North, 'The Medieval Background to Copernicus' in Beer and Strand, 'Copernicus,' p. 11f; Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 119–122; Bienkowska (ed.) *World of Copernicus*, pp. 8, 86.

[26]Beer and Strand, 'Copernicus,' pp. 11–12. Buridan's pupil, Nicholas Oresme, used a similar analogy of the movement of boats to demonstrate that one body alters its position only relative to another, and Copernicus later repeated the

earth was moving seemed impossible, was it not even less likely, he argued, that the immense sphere of stars was rotating daily on its axis.[27]

The French philosopher, Bishop Nicholas Oresme (1323–1382), in a treatise, *On the Heaven and the Universe*, also examined the theory of motion of the earth as opposed to the sun in the same terms, highly suggestive of the sun–centred universe.[28] In the fifteenth century, another ecclesiastic, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), formulated new cosmological ideas, based on the idea of the earth as mobile and spherical, demonstrating that the traditional picture of the universe was not accepted unconditionally by all learned members of the church.[29] Kuhn sums up his importance:

> In the fifteenth century the eminent cardinal and papal legate Nicholas of Cusa had propounded a radical Neoplatonic cosmology and had not even bothered about the conflict between his views and scripture. Though he portrayed the earth as a moving star, like the sun and other stars, and though his works were widely read and had great influence, he was not condemned or even criticized by his church.[30]

Cusanus, moreover, believed that the universe, equated with God in Neoplatonic terms, was an infinite sphere, whose centre was everywhere and whose

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same idea (Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 16). Butterfield, *Origins of Modern Science*, p. 28, uses an interesting modern analogy of perception of motion in two adjacent trains. This concept of relative motion is crucial for Copernicus' transference of motion from the sun to the earth.

[27]Butterfield, *Origins of Modern Science*, pp. 28–29.

[28]For Oresme, see E. Grant, *Nicholas Oresme and the Kinematics of Circular Motion*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971; Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 115–117, 120–121; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 202f.

[29]Such ideas were expressed in Cusanus' *De Docta Ignorantia* (especially ii, 12). See also Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 197, 233–235; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 209–210; Cassirer, *Individual and the Cosmos*, chapters 1 and 2, especially p. 69; S. Toulmin and J. Goodfield, *The Fabric of the Heavens*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p. 182. Poulet emphasises the similarities between Cusanus and Dante (Poulet, 'Metamorphoses of the Circle,' p. 167) and Wind (*Pagan Mysteries*, pp. 54 and 239–240) notes the influence of Cusanus on the Italian Neoplatonists.

[30]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, p. 197. See also M. de Gandillac, 'Le rôle du Soleil dans la pensée de Nicolas de Cues,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 341–361.

circumference was nowhere.[31] Cusanus' concept of infinity is especially relevant for the discussion on Michelangelo's fresco since the notion that the background of the fresco is a representation of infinity has been discussed in the literature.[32]

Other more immediate predecessors of Copernicus who were also acknowledged by him, include the German Astronomer Peurbach (1423–61) and his pupil Johann Mueller called Regiomontanus (1436–76), who had brought about the revival of astronomy as an exact science in the fifteenth century.[33] Copernicus' own principal teacher in astronomy was the Italian Domenico da Novara, who was, in turn, a pupil of Regiomontanus and was also a well known Platonist.[34]

v) Neoplatonic Influences on Copernicus

In many ways, therefore, by the early sixteenth century the world was

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[31]'Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique et circumferentia nusquam (Nicholas Cusanus, *De Doctora Ignorantia*, ii, 12), referred to by Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, pp. 69, 176. See also P. Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology, Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void and the Plurality of Worlds*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, where he demonstrates the type of discussion prevalent in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and prior to Copernicus. See also A. Koyré, *Du Monde Clos à l'Univers Infini*, available in English as *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore: Jonhs Hopkins, 1957 (especially pp. 6–12 on Cusanus's cosmology). For the concept of infinity as expressed in art at this time, see S. Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, New York, 1975, p. 20f., where Giotto's Padua frescoes (c. 1305) are quoted as an example.

[32]For precursors of Copernicus on the topic of infinity, see also E. Grant, 'Late Medieval Thought, Copernicus and The Scientific Revolution,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 23, 1962, 197–220; *idem*, 'Medieval Conceptions of an Infinite Void Space,' pp. 39–60; McColley, 'Nicholas Copernicus and the Infinite universe,' pp. 525–35. Copernicus himself preferred 'to leave the question of infinity to the philosophers' (Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, book 1, chapter 8), but it was certainly implied by his thesis (Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 232–237; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 220; Koyré, *Closed World*, pp. 33–34). This discussion bears comparison with Hartt's comment on Michelangelo's fresco (mentioned above, chapter 4, note 29): 'The airy background of the fresco of course should not be construed as infinity, the notion of infinite space had occurred to no–one in the '1530's,' which is incorrect. As Koyré observes, 'The conception of the infinity of the universe, like everything else...originates, of course, with the Greeks,' (Koyré, *Closed World*, p. 5).

[33]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 129, 285; also Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 210–212. Regiomontanus had, significantly, compared the Sun with the King and Heart of the planetary system, (Rybka, 'Cracow Intellectual Climate,' p. 167).

[34]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 212.

ready for an innovative view of the universe. Copernicus came on the scene at the very moment when the increased flow of information could both bring him the raw materials for his theory and also disseminate his own ideas, especially through the innovation of the printing press.[35] Copernicus' links with humanist and Neoplatonic circles which were re-examining the heliocentric idea are confirmed by his direct contacts. Born in Torun, Copernicus initially studied at the University of Cracow, before being appointed canon at Frauenburg through the offices of his uncle, the Bishop of Ermland, and most of his lifetime was spent in this area. It is important to remember, however, that Copernicus obtained extensive leave from this remote corner of Europe and travelled a great deal. Copernicus studied in Italy and was strongly influenced by a total of seven years at humanist universities.[36] Virtually contemporary with Michelangelo (Copernicus was born in 1473: Michelangelo in 1475), Copernicus moved in very similar circles of learning in Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. He was in Bologna, an important centre of humanist learning, from autumn 1496 when he was registered for law. He was in Rome in the Jubilee year of 1500 where he served as apprentice for the Roman Curia and lectured on mathematics and astronomy.[37] It is significant that this paralleled Michelangelo's own movements, for the artist also visited Bologna in the late 1490's and was in Rome at the turn of the century.[38] In 1501–02 Copernicus studied medicine at Padua; in 1503 he

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[35]The importance of the printed word, especially in Italy, is highly significant for the development of Copernicus' ideas; firstly because of the increased availability of Latin and Greek classics as well as humanist literature, and secondly for the final dissemination of Copernicus' own ideas. See O. Gingerich, 'Copernicus and the Impact of Printing,' in Beer and Strand, *Copernicus*, p. 201f.

[36]Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, pp. 36–37; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 131–134; O. Gingerich, 'Crisis versus aesthetic in the Copernican Revolution' in Beer and Strand, 'Copernicus,' pp. 85–93; A. C. Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo*, London: Heinemann, 1970, vol. 2, p. 175f.; Toulmin, *Fabric of the Heavens*, pp. 187–199.

[37]Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, p. 36; A. Armitage, *Sun, Stand thou Still*, London: Sigma, 1947, pp. 72–84. Copernicus' 'disciple' Rheticus stated that, 'he lectured before a large audience of students and a throng of great men' (Rheticus, *Narratio Prima*, 1540, reproduced in E. Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, New York: Octagon, 1971, p. 111, which will be discussed in greater detail below).

[38]Michelangelo was in Bologna between 1493 and late 1496 and visited it

received a doctorate in canon law from Ferrara. These were all well known centres of current humanist and Neoplatonic learning of a type which also influenced Michelangelo.[39]

The Neoplatonic undercurrent in Copernicus' work has been argued with almost as much fervour as the Neoplatonic influence on Michelangelo.[40] In particular, the writings of Ficino, including *De Sole* and *Platonic Theology*, which were available to Copernicus in Poland, have been maintained as having been influential on Copernicus' formation of his theory.[41] Ficino's approach to the Sun as Deity and symbolic centre of the universe, and his reference, 'the sun was created first and in the middle of the universe,' have been argued as especially pertinent for Copernicus. A comparison might also be drawn between Copernicus' 'In the middle of all resides the sun...So indeed the Sun remains, as if in his kingly dominion,' (quoted in full, chapter 1) and Ficino's 'the sun sits as if occupying a rock in the centre, in the manner of a king.'[42]

Actual quotations from Plato himself are quite common in Copernicus' writings,[43] as well as the expression of more generalized Neoplatonic ideas

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intermittently thereafter; he was in Rome 1496–1501 (Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, pp. 17–18; Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 1, lviii–lix). Another link is provided by the fact that while in Rome, Copernicus associated with Bernard Sculteti (the representative of his chapter of Varmia in Rome), who was afterwards private chaplain to Pope Leo X Medici (Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 133–134, 149).

[39]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 123–133; Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, pp. 17–18.

[40]See chapter 7 on Neoplatonism and Ficino above. A copy of Plato's works, edited by Ficino and annotated by Copernicus has recently been found (Russell, *Background to Copernicus*, p. 39). For Copernicus and Neoplatonism, see also Hallyn, *Poetic Structure*, p. 35f. ('The World and the Cave') and pp. 111–125.

[41]See Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 130f. Also Rybka, 'Cracow Intellectual Climate,' pp. 165–169, where the connection between Italian Neoplatonism and Cracow is effectively argued. Rybka stresses the fact that followers of Neoplatonism 'propagated a cult of the Sun which was equated by them with God,' and he traces direct links between Copernicus and Ficino. On the relationship between the Copernican Revolution and Renaissance Solar myths, see also E. Garin, 'La rivoluzione Copernicana e il mito solare,' in *Rinascite Rivoluzioni. Movimenti Culturali dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, Rome: Laterza, 1976, pp. 255–296.

[42]Ficino, *De Sole* (ed. cit.), p. 132.

[43]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 7, 12, 18, 19, 25, 227. Actual quotations from Plato are also common in Rheticus' *Narratio Prima*, a summary preview of

concerning the harmony of the universe. His defense of the heliocentric system was very much related to aesthetic concepts, especially the Platonic principle of simplicity and perfection. Copernicus also significantly referred to the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, regarded by him as the precursor of Plato.[44] Copernicus' ideas of simplicity, order and harmony in physics, astronomy and mathematics correspond to similar Neoplatonic concepts expressed in philosophy and art. This type of Neoplatonism was not regarded as being incompatible with Christianity. Like other Neoplatonists, Copernicus was neither neopagan nor atheist. He continually referred to God as the architect of the universe, albeit a Sun–centred one. His search for perfection and harmony fits in with the Neoplatonic standpoint: 'The metaphysics guiding Copernicus towards his heliocentric universe was compounded out of two elements; a humanist's Neoplatonic Sun–worship together with a mathematician's commitment to the rationality of the created world.'[45] 'Neoplatonism', writes Koyré, 'is evident in Copernicus' attitude towards both the Sun and the idea of mathematical harmony. He adores the Sun and almost deifies it.'[46]

The Neoplatonic element in Copernicus' writings has only been seriously disputed by Rosen who overlooks Copernicus' several direct references to Plato,

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Copernicus' printed work, (in Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 142–150 and 162–168 *passim*).

[44]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 22 (and above, chapter 1, p. 1; chapter 7, section vi). See Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 241–243, and Garin, *Astrology*, p. 111, for Hermeticism in Copernicus.

[45]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 137–131. See also J. R. Ravetz, 'The Humanistic Significance of our Copernican Heritage,' in Beer and Strand, 'Copernicus,' p. 147, and *idem*, 'Origins of the Copernican Revolution,' *Nature*, 189, March 1961, pp. 854–860: 'Sun and circle worship and mathematical elegance play their part, but a belief in the intelligibility of God's heavens may have been crucial,' p. 860.

[46]A. Koyré, *The Astronomical Revolution*, London: Methuen, 1973, p. 65. This, of course, should be compared with the Neoplatonic attitude towards the Sun as outlined above in chapter 7, as well as with the Christian attitude toward the Sun as a symbol of the Deity (see chapter 5 above). Copernicus makes many references to God throughout his writings (Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 7, 22). He was a canon of the cathedral of Frauenburg, and the fact that in 1537 he was nominated as candidate for the Bishopric of Ermland makes it highly probable that he did actually enter the priesthood (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4, p. 353).

and whose arguments appear unconvincing.[47] Apart from this, the only serious argument which might be put forward against Copernicus being influenced by Neoplatonism is that Plato's physical cosmology would seem to be basically geocentric. In spite of Plato's reverence for the sun as symbol of the 'Good,' or the personification of the Deity, it is not placed at the centre of the *physical* universe (as is God in Ficino's cosmology), but, allegorically, a central position is inferred, even by Plato.[48] This suggests that Copernicus was concerned with Platonic ideas and metaphysical concepts, as much as with Plato's cosmology in the technical sense. In any case there was some ambiguity regarding Plato's cosmological view. In the *Narratio Prima* (a preliminary publication in 1540 of Copernicus' theory by his 'disciple' Rheticus, 1514–1576, which will be discussed in more detail below) it is made quite clear that Copernicus understood Plato's cosmology as having the earth in motion on its axis and around the sun, and recent scholarship continues to discuss whether Plato's universe was geocentric or heliocentric and whether he viewed the earth as mobile.[49]

The fact that Copernicus' system was not entirely innovative but did retain certain aspects of the Aristotelian system of the universe has often received

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[47]E. Rosen, 'Was Copernicus a Neoplatonist?' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44, 1983, pp. 667–669. Rosen bases his argument against Copernicus as a Neoplatonist by presenting evidence that his friend and teacher, Domenico da Novara was not a Neoplatonist. Without any supporting evidence, other than 'like master, like pupil,' Rosen then concludes that neither Novara, Copernicus, nor Rheticus was a Neoplatonist. He misconstrues the significance of the Hermetic writings and does not take into account other Neoplatonic influences to which Copernicus was exposed at centres in Cracow and in Italy; nor does he consider the actual Platonic sentiment expressed in *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* and *Narratio Prima*.

[48]Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*. See also S. K. Heniger, 'Pythagorean Cosmology and the Triumph of Heliocentrism,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 35–53. This is useful for the ancient background to Copernicus and also for the recognition of Platonic and Pythagorean aspects of his ideas.

[49]Rheticus, *Narratio Prima* (ed. cit.), pp. 147–148 and 150. Rheticus writes: 'Following Plato and the Pythagoreans...my teacher [Copernicus] thought, that in order to determine the causes of the phenomena, circular motions must be ascribed to the spherical earth' and '... the first motion which my teacher, in company with Plato, assigns to the earth.' For discussion concerning whether Plato argued for heliocentricity and the motion of the earth, see Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos*, pp. 174–185.

comment.[50] The old views were not entirely discarded as they became superseded by the new, but the same basic approach might be argued as that which has been argued above for Michelangelo in his art, namely that innovation and tradition may be combined in a unique synthesis. The integration of ideas is the keynote.

vi) Copernicus and his writings

Copernicus' outline of his heliocentric system *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (also referred to as *Revolutions*) was published in 1543, a date which actually coincided with the year of his death at the age of seventy. Recognized tradition has it that Copernicus received the first copy on his death bed and expired later the same day (24th May, 1543).[51] That date therefore clearly does not mark the date of origin of his heliocentric theory; the availability of the book in published form has little to do with the date of Copernicus' formulation of his ideas. Obviously, Copernicus' theory originated well before this time, even if it was to some extent kept secret, or, rather, not specifically made public by him.

When it was finally published in 1543, Copernicus' *Revolutions* was actually dedicated to the Pope, Paul III, the same Pope who patronized Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. In his Preface (see Appendix IV),[52] Copernicus explains the reasons for the delay in publication and he describes how he was finally persuaded to publish the volume and permit it to appear 'after being buried amongst my papers and lying concealed not merely until the ninth year but by now the fourth period of nine years.'[53] This suggests a date of origin for the

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[50]Explained more fully by Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 200–205; Butterfield *Origins of Modern Science*, chapter 2, 'The Conservatism of Copernicus.'

[51]Koyré, *Astronomical Revolution*, p. 34. This was recorded by Bishop Tiedemann Giese (Copernicus' friend and fellow–canon, later bishop) in a letter to Rheticus, dated 26th July, 1543 (see Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 339).

[52]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 3–6; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 550.

[53]*Ibid*, p. 3. Since the preface was completed in 1542, the reference to the work having been concealed for nine years suggests that the ideas had been kept in abeyance specifically since 1533 (the year of the inception of the *Last Judgment* commission), which will be discussed further below. In the *Narratio Prima*, written in 1539, Rheticus also refers to the fact that Copernicus had already written out his theory (in Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 109–110). The

work right at the very beginning of the sixteenth century and confirms that his ideas had originated well before the time of publication. Fear of ridicule, rather than fear of persecution appears to have been his motive for delaying publication, but how successful Copernicus actually was in 'keeping his secret' is of great importance if an influence on Michelangelo in the years 1533–41 is to be argued. The concealment of sophisticated intellectual ideas from the masses appears to have been common in this age. Ficino's comment that 'it was the practice of the ancient theologians to clothe the divine mysteries in mathematical symbols and poetic images lest they be exhibited defencelessly to the gaze of the vulgar,' seems to be applicable in the case of Copernicus and is, coincidentally, strongly reminiscent also of Aretino's comment on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, cited above (p. vi).[54]

According to Kuhn, for two decades before the publication of his principal work, Copernicus had been widely recognized as one of Europe's leading astronomers,[55] and reports about his research, including his new hypothesis, had circulated since about 1515. Far from his ideas being secret, as Thorndike writes,

> The scientific world of that time, if not *public opinion generally*, had been gradually prepared for the final publication of the full text of Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus* in 1543, and may even be said, as a result of this previous propaganda, to have been looking forwards eagerly to its appearance. Copernicus already had a great reputation as an astronomer...he reached the height of his reputation *about 1525*.[56] [my italics]

As evidence of his reputation, the fact may also be cited that Copernicus was included in the general invitation of 21st July, 1514, issued by Pope Leo X (de'

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use of astronomical observations of around 1530 suggests this as about the time Copernicus actually wrote out *Revolutions*.

[54]Ficino's comment cited by Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 91. Cf. also the Hermetic concept of secrecy, above, chapter 7, section vi.

[55]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, p. 185.

[56]L. Thorndike, *A History of Magical and Experimental Science*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1923, vol. 5, p. 408.

Medici) at the Fifth Lateran Council to leading astronomers to advise on the reform of the calendar. The Bishop of Fossombrone, otherwise known as the astronomer Paul of Middelburg (1445–1533), who was in charge of this project, asked Copernicus to participate and give some advice. Copernicus himself referred to this encouragement nearly thirty years later, in the Preface to *Revolutions*, an interesting point when one considers that Paul of Middelburg was also a close associate of Ficino.[57] Copernicus is known to have replied to the Council, but to have declined the invitation to travel to Rome.[58]

Authorities tend to agree that Copernicus probably formulated the core of his ideas on heliocentricity while still a student at Cracow (1491–1494)[59] but it is important also to bear in mind Copernicus' seven years of study in Italy (1496–1503). His contact, here, with Domenico da Novara has already been mentioned;[60] in Ferrara, he probably also met Celio Calcagnini (1479–1541), poet and philosopher, whose short book, *On the Immobility of Heaven and the Mobility of the Earth* also echoed an idea that was 'very much in the air.'[61] It is thus possible that Copernicus was already referring to heliocentricity in his years at Bologna and Rome, where he lectured in public. In any case his theory was

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[57]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 149; Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 125–126; Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, p. 5. For correspondence between Paul of Middelburg and Ficino, see Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 22–23 ('in you, Oh Paul, it seems to have perfected astronomy. And in Florence it restored the Platonic doctrine from darkness to light'); Ficino, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. xvii; and P. and L. Murray, *The Art of the Renaissance*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971, p. 7.

[58]See Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 343. Paul of Middelburg listed Copernicus among those who replied. It is curious that Copernicus' letter was subsequently lost.

[59]J. R. Ravetz, 'The Origins of the Copernican Revolution,' *Scientific American*, 215 (4), October, 1966, pp. 86–98, p. 92; Koyré, *Astronomical Revolution*, p. 20f.; Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, p. 86; Rybka, 'Cracow Intellectual Climate,' p. 166.

[60]Novara avowed that Copernicus was 'not so much his pupil as his assistant' (see Rheticus, *Narratio Prima*, p. 111).

[61]The full Latin title reads: *Quomodo coelum stet, terra moveatur, vel de perenni motu terrae Commentario*, for which see Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 212–213. Koestler uses this and other examples to demonstrate how Copernicus 'crystallized' an idea which was much under discussion. As mentioned already above, Calcagnini was friend to Ariosto (*Orlando Furioso*, p. 558) and knew the work of Egidio da Viterbo and Cusanus (Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, pp. 13 and 240).

certainly formulated in the main by the time he wrote *Nicolai Copernici de Hypothesibus Motuum Coelestium a se Constitutis Commentariolus.*[62] The *Commentariolus*, as it is called, is far less well known than the *Revolutions* of 1543. Its precise date of writing is uncertain but it was circulating in manuscript form by 1514, since on 1st May that year, the historian Matthias Miechow recorded a copy in the library at Cracow – 'a short treatise maintaining that the earth moves and the sun remains in a state of rest.'[63] In the *Commentariolus*, Copernicus states quite clearly his seven assumptions which include the statement that: 'All the spheres revolve about the sun as their mid point and therefore the sun is the centre of the universe.'[64] So Copernicus' theory of heliocentricity was available, at least to a limited extent, in written and duplicated form as early as 1514. This manuscript was probably not meant for general public consumption at this stage and seems to have been circulated only to selected friends and colleagues.[65]

In addition to the *Commentariolus*, Rosen cites Copernicus' 'Letter against Werner' of 3rd June 1524, written in reply to the astronomical tract of Professor Werner, as further evidence of growing interest in Copernicus and scholarly knowledge of his theories in the early part of the sixteenth century. This letter, which rebuked Werner's *On the Motion of the Eighth Sphere* because it was critical of the ancient astronomers, also circulated in duplicated and handwritten form in the 1520's.[66] In learned circles, there was undoubtedly an increasing

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[62]Printed in full in Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 57–90; Copernicus' name was included in the title. Cf. Hawking's comment that Copernicus circulated his work anonymously in 1514 because he feared persecution (S. Hawking, *Brief History of Time*, London: Bantam, 1988, p. 34).

[63]Koyré, *Astronomical Revolution*, p. 25 and n. 51 on p. 85; Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, p. 19; Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, n. 21 on p. 67.

[64]See Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*; pp. 58–59 for the seven assumptions which also include the notions that the centre of the earth is not the centre of the universe and that the earth's motion on its axis and its orbit around the sun are responsible for the apparent motion of the sun and the Heavens. Copernicus also comments on the magnitude of the universe.

[65]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 6; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 148. *Commentariolus* was not published until 1878.

[66]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 7–9. This form of correspondence and

knowledge and interest in the astronomer from Varmia and his ideas. During the next twenty years, Copernicus' reputation was growing on an international scale and his personal fame, as well as his yet unpublished thesis, was becoming popularly known.

vii) Copernicus in Art.

The depiction of sun symbols in Renaissance art has already been discussed in chapter 5 from the theological point of view, but the influence of scientific theory and Copernicus also merits consideration. Evidence that a new world view was already having an effect on a wider audience becomes clear in the context of painting by the first third of the sixteenth century.[67] Copernicus' physical appearance was known and several portraits exist (for example, fig. 120). Giorgione's painting of *The Three Philosophers*, 1509–1510 (fig. 121), with their scientific apparatus and diagrams, has been argued as having an astronomical theme and Pignatti discusses Copernicus as one possible identification of the youngest philosopher on the left.[68] This idea has also been discussed in scientific publications[69] and the figure does seem to bear some resemblance to known portraits of the astronomer (fig. 120).[70] The inclusion of the setting (or rising) sun,

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the circulation of handwritten 'letters' served the function now accorded to scientific periodicals. The Letter, which is printed in full, *ibid.*, pp. 91–106, indicates that Copernicus had formulated his own special theory which he intended to publicize (p. 106).

[67]This is discussed in terms of the influence of religious, philosophical and scientific background by F. N. Arnoldi, 'L'iconographie du Soleil dans la Renaissance,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 521–538. He refers to astronomical and solar imagery from the Old Sacristy at San Lorenzo (1439), to Sun–Deity symbolism on the tomb of Sixtus IV, to De Tolnay's theory concerning Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as anticipatory of Copernican heliocentricity, which is dismissed (p. 567). It is surprising that at this interdisciplinary conference (from which many papers have here been cited), the combination of scientific and art historical experts did not then result in the questioning of De Tolnay's conclusions.

[68]See J. Wilde, *Venetian Art from Bellini to Titian*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1974, cover and pp. 66–69; and T. Pignatti, *Giorgione*, Venice: Alfieri, 1969, pp. 104–105.

[69]Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, p. 97.

[70]Several contemporary portraits of Nicholas Copernicus are known. See Bienkowska (ed.) *World of Copernicus*, opposite p. 96, and compare Russell,

here, also seems apt as the young astronomer turns towards it with his back to the older men. It is probably significant that this painting was completed by Sebastiano del Piombo (1485–1547), whose close associations with Michelangelo at the time of the commission of the *Last Judgment* are well known.[71]

Leonardo da Vinci, almost as famous for his scientific observations as for his art, wrote 'The sun does not move' ('il sole no si move'). This comment, Richter remarks, occurs in the middle of mathematical notes and is written in 'uncommonly large letters.'[72] The passage is not dated but must be prior to 1519 when Leonardo died in France, and it suggests that Leonardo might either have heard of Copernicus or come to similar conclusions. Dürer's cosmic symbolism in his apocalyptic visions and his use of Sun–symbolism in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century have already been mentioned, and attest to the contemporary importance of these themes.[73] Altdorfer's *Nativity of Christ*, c. 1520, and his *Battle of Alexander the Great*, 1529, (fig. 122) have also been discussed by Benesch as relating to the new cosmology.[74] Yet Copernican influence on Michelangelo was said, by De Tolnay, to have been an impossibility. His conclusions seem all the more strange in view of the fact that De Tolnay was Benesch's pupil and evidently familiar with and influenced by the former's approach to cosmology in art. In the light of these interpretations, it seems

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Background to Copernicus, p. 35.

[71]J. Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, New York, Harper and Row, 1981, pp. 350–351; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 21.

[72]Now at Windsor (RL12669 verso). J. P. Richter, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, New York: Dover, 1970, vol. 2, p. 152; it occurs amidst Leonardo's extensive work on light and optics. See also V. P. Zoubov, 'Le Soleil dans l'Oeuvre Scientifique de Léonard de Vinci,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 177–198; V. Cronin, *The View from Planet Earth*, London: Collins, 1981, pp. 89 and 100; and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 186–187, where Leonardo's debt to Ficino in his conception of the sun is noted.

[73]Strauss, *Complete Engravings, Etchings and Drypoints of Albrecht Dürer*, plates 37, 67, 79 and especially 25, already mentioned above, chapter 5.

[74]O. Benesch, *The Art of the Renaissance in Northern Europe. Its Relation to Contemporary and Intellectual Movements*, London: Phaidon, 1965, chapter 8, 'Related Trends in Art and Science of the Late Renaissance,' especially pp. 56–59, 144–145. The relationship between art in the Renaissance and Copernican ideas (especially circle and point symbolism) is also discussed by Hallyn, *Poetic Structure*, pp. 114–118, 129–139.

inexplicable that De Tolnay dismissed the idea of a direct Copernican influence on Michelangelo's painting which was completed at a much later date.[75]

Copernicus' theory was evidently becoming popular knowledge in Italy by the 1530's, for Chastel records:

> The first literary echo of the discoveries of Copernicus, long in advance of any scholarly reaction, is Doni's account of the conversations of the common people gathered in the evening on the Piazza del Duomo [in Florence].[76]

Copernicus' ideas were well enough known in common circles for a public satire to take place at Elblag in Poland in 1531, when 'a certain schoolmaster with dramatic malevolence in the theatre ridiculed his opinion about the motion of the earth.'[77] It was probably this type of critical reaction from the unlearned which made Copernicus reluctant to publish – because he feared ridicule by the unintelligent.[78]

It is acknowledged that all this evidence still remains inconclusive and somewhat circumstantial if a direct influence of Copernican cosmology on Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is to be argued; but it is possible to find even more positive support for the idea that Michelangelo could have been acquainted with the heliocentric theory at the time of the creation of the *Last Judgment.*

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[75]For this connection, see obituary by De Tolnay on Benesch (*ibid.*, p. ix). For details of De Tolnay's arguments, see chapter 1, above. De Tolnay evidently looked only at the publication date and made a judgment accordingly, without considering the far reaching and interwoven aspects of the intellectual society of the time.

[76]A. Chastel, *The Age of Renaissance Humanism, Europe, 1480–1530*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1962, p. 92. No date is given for Doni's letter which was, however, published by 1543 (see Schutte, '*Lettere Volgari*,' p. 652). Anton Francesco Doni (1513–74) was a well known Copernican (*Enciclopedia Italiana*, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1949, vol. 3, p. 144) and also corresponded with Michelangelo (Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 164).

[77]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 375–378; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 156.

[78]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 156, '...it was not martyrdom he feared but ridicule.' Although convinced he was right, Copernicus was unable to *prove* his thesis; it appeared to be contrary to tradition and to visual observation. See Copernicus' Preface, *De Revolutionibus*, p. 3 (Appendix IV).

viii) Reaction of the Church, Protestant and Catholic

Owing to the relationship between theology and cosmology, as discussed above, chapter 2, the attitude of the church at the time is significant and must also be considered, especially if the inclusion of a Copernican theme in Michelangelo's fresco is proposed and especially if such an inclusion might be considered to have heretical overtones.

It is, in addition, important to remember that, notwithstanding the change in relationship between artist and patron in the period, the tradition which had held since St Basil and the Council of Nicaea I (in 325) that 'the execution alone belongs to the painter, the selection and arrangement of the subjects is the prerogative of the Holy Fathers' was still largely applicable, even in the case of Michelangelo.[79] It has been presumed that Michelangelo had instructors and theological advisers for the program of the ceiling of the Sistine chapel even though his own ideas might have been incorporated,[80] but evidence does suggest that he was given an unusual amount of lee–way over the content and design of the fresco for the altar wall, where he again worked basically on his own.[81] Pope Clement VII who instigated the fresco had a reputation as a discerning and particular patron,[82] and where complex dogma was to be expressed in a single image at the very heart of Christendom, it does seem unlikely that Michelangelo would deliberately have introduced notions that would be disagreeable or even

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[79]For the ruling of the Council of Nicaea, see Mâle, *Gothic Image*, p. 392. For changes in patronage and the relationships between artist, patron and client in the Renaissance, see Hale, *Encyclopaedia of the Renaissance*, p. 239; Burke, *Culture and Society*, chapter 4.

[80]Although he was able to have more freedom than usually permitted (Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 1, no. 157, p. 149). See Dotson, 'Augustinian Interpretation,' for the suggestion of Egidio da Viterbo as adviser.

[81]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1882f. ; (ed. Bull) p. 378f.

[82]Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, pp. 59, 156–158. For example, in the projects for the S. Lorenzo facade and the Laurentian Library, Clement (then Cardinal) made it quite clear that it was essential for his wishes to be carried out exactly, to the most minor details concerning types of marble and wood to be used – 'see you carry out the orders we have given you and fail not to do so' (Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 218; Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, pp. 93, 146; Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 263). The idea of Clement (as Pope) giving totally free rein or Michelangelo flouting his wishes in a major fresco thus appears unlikely.

heretical in the eyes of his patron, as has been argued by Steinberg.[83] The argument that ideas associated with Lutheran heresy were introduced in the fresco thus appears to be implausible. It seems far more probable that ideas expressed, even ones which deviated slightly from what has come to be regarded as the Catholic norm, were perpetrated with the consent of Clement VII, who instigated the fresco, and Paul III, who saw the commission to its conclusion.[84]

From Early Christian times up to the Renaissance, the Church's attitude had been a determining factor in the progress of science and especially of astronomy.[85] The main feature of the Copernican system, that the earth lost its central place and became no more than another one of the planets, had great religious significance. Copernicus' conclusion that the earth was not at the centre of the universe, but travelled around a stationary sun, challenged all the traditional and scriptural concepts. It eventually caused great anxiety, because it appeared to contradict common sense observation and required a measure of sophisticated abstract thinking.[86] Throughout the Middle Ages and much of the Renaissance it had generally been agreed that the sun circulated around the earth, and the majority of people thus viewed the earth, and hence Man, as situated in the centre of a spherical universe. Copernicus' heliocentric view spoilt this neat arrangement and, since the new cosmological view challenged also the central authority of the Catholic Church and the Scriptures, Copernicus' theory was eventually condemned. However, these implications were not fully realized until very much later than the middle of the sixteenth century. *De Revolutionibus* was not placed on any versions of the *Index of Prohibited Books* in the second half of

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[83]Steinberg, 'Merciful Heresy,' discussed above, chapter 4, section v. Hall disagrees with Steinberg's perception of heresy in the fresco (Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' n. on p. 85), giving further reasons for its improbability.

[84]Paul III, in requesting the completion of the fresco, determined that the original designs should be followed without alteration. See the Breve of Paul III (De Campos, *Last Judgment*, pp. 97–99) and Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1882; (ed. Bull) p. 378.

[85]See White, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*; Russell, *Religion and Science*; Draper, *Religion and Science*; and chapter 2 above.

[86]See especially Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 219–22...

the sixteenth century, and was not in fact banned by the Catholics until 1616, seventy–three years after its publication and the death of its author.[87] It thus took more than half a century for the wider implications of the theory to be realized and, in the years immediately following Copernicus' lifetime, his theories caused little conflict in the Catholic Church as will be demonstrated.

In fact, the Protestants took exception to Copernicus' theories far more speedily than did the Catholics, and reacted by condemning the theory of heliocentricity.[88] Luther himself was acquainted with Copernicus' theory by the 1530's. He cited scripture against the heliocentric idea in 1539, some time *before* the publication of *Revolutions*, again reinforcing the fact that Copernicus' theory was then in circulation. This also preceded the publication in 1540 of the *Narratio Prima*, the summary of Copernicus' ideas published by his devotee and follower Rheticus, who was a Protestant himself and had evidently heard of Copernicus and his ideas by 1538 when he resolved to travel from Wittenberg to Varmia to become Copernicus' 'disciple.'[89] Evidently informed by rumour in the same way, in one of his *Table Talks* held in 1539, Martin Luther was quoted as saying:

> ...people gave ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon....This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth.[90]

Melanchthon, Luther's supporter, also spoke out against Copernicus and harshly condemned the new doctrine, assembling anti–Copernican Biblical passages (for

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[87]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, n. on p. 342.

[88]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 185f. and 191–192. Luther's approach to cosmology remained Biblical and traditional: 'Our eyes bear witness to the revolution of the Heavens' (quoted by Bienkowska, ed., *World of Copernicus*, p. 123).

[89]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 393–395.

[90]M. Luther, *Table Talks* (ed. G. Tappert), Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967, pp. 54, 358–359.

example, Ecclesiastes 1:4–5) and denouncing him in public.[91] On 16th October 1541, in a letter to a friend he wrote of 'that Sarmatian astronomer who is trying to stop the sun and move the earth' ('rem tandem absurdam');[92] Copernicus' theory of heliocentricity was clearly known by this time. The Protestants were heated in their denunciation of Copernicus, objecting to it on the basic grounds of their Biblical fundamentalism, so the idea that any acceptance of Copernican ideas might be linked with Protestant heresies at this time is unwarranted.

On the other hand, contrary to what might be expected, we discover that the Catholic Church at this time made no move. Kopal writes:

> Its thesis was accepted with lukewarm interest on the part of the educated Catholic clergy and without demur by Pope Paul III to whom Copernicus' book was dedicated.[93]

Copernicus' theories made 'quite spectacular progress very quickly amongst learned circles' and 'neither the Pope nor anyone else at Rome appears to have been shocked by the new cosmological system.'[94] As Kopal further points out, the extremely complex religious implications of the work were not fully realized until a very much later date;

> The real theological storm in which both Catholics and Protestants began to outbid each other in their denunciations of the heliocentric system did not break out until the first third of the seventeenth century in the wake of

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[91]Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 191–2. Calvin later also denounced Copernicus (*ibid.*). See also Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 156 and 572.

[92]Beer and Strand, *Copernicus*, p. 139.

[93]Z. Kopal, 'foreward' in Bienkowska (ed.), *World of Copernicus*, p. xi; G. Sarton, *The Appreciation of Ancient and Medieval Science during the Renaissance*, Pennsylvania: University of Philadelphia Press, 1955, p. 162.

[94]Koyré, *Astronomical Revolution*, pp. 27–28. It is important to recall at this stage the population statistics of Renaissance Italy, since the 'learned circles' were small and extremely close knit (as has already been suggested by the connections between different persons). Burke, *Culture and Society*, pp. 252–253, gives the population of Rome c. 1550 as only 45,000, hardly larger than a very small town by present–day standards (about half the size of Cambridge, England, pop. 90,440 in 1981), where leading figures in intellectual circles would surely be well known to one another.

> the experimental work of Galileo and Kepler.[95]

As Galileo himself argued[96] in defense of the heliocentric system in 1616, Copernicus had been a sincere Catholic as well as a celebrated astronomer and:

> when printed the book [*Revolutions*] was accepted by the holy church, and it has been read and studied by everyone without the faintest hint of any objection ever being conceived against its doctrines.[97]

ix) Clement VII and the Vatican Lecture

The likelihood of a general knowledge of heliocentricity, and more specifically Copernican heliocentricity, in Italy by the 1530's has been demonstrated, alongside evidence of the absence of resistance by the Catholic Church. What is more, and what shows that it was neither impossible nor heretical for Copernicus' ideas to have influenced Michelangelo's design for the *Last Judgment*, is the fact that Clement VII, who inaugurated that commission, had also shown a high degree of personal interest in the heliocentric theory, long before its publication. Significantly for our argument, in 1533 Clement VII actually requested that Copernicus' theory, of which he had evidently heard, should be explained to him and a number of other high dignitaries of the Catholic

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[95]Kopal, in Bienkowska (ed.) *World of Copernicus*, p. xi.

[96]See Galileo Galilei, *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina, 1616*, (ed. S. Drake), New York: Doubleday, 1957, pp. 175–216, especially pp. 178–181. This letter was written in defence of Copernicus in the face of the imminent banning of his work by the Catholic Church.

[97]*Ibid.*, p. 178. Although Galileo's career postdates the period in question (he was born the day that Michelangelo died), it is here necessary to address Rosen's paper 'Galileo's Misstatements about Copernicus,' *Isis*, 49, 1958, pp. 319–330. Rosen argues that Galileo was incorrect in stating that Copernicus' book was 'accepted by the holy church' overlooking the fact that Galileo qualifies the statement 'when printed.' Rosen also claims as mistakes by Galileo his statements that Copernicus was called to Rome, was encouraged by 'a supreme pontiff,' was ordained priest and contributed towards the basis for the Gregorian Calendar. Nevertheless, as has been shown, Copernicus *was* a canon and sincere member of the Catholic Church, he *was* included in the general call to Rome by the Lateran Council, he did receive support from the Church and within the Vatican itself, and his work did contribute to late sixteenth–century calendrical reform. As one who was obviously very concerned about the proposed banning of Copernicus' theory, Galileo tended to bind Copernicus closely to the Catholic Church. Space does not allow a more detailed refutation of Rosen's paper.

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Church in the Vatican itself.[98] This fact, evidently better known in scientific circles than in art historical ones, was documented by the lecturer Albert Widmanstadt on the cover of a precious manuscript presented to him by the Pope to mark the occasion (see figs. 123 and 124). The inscription reads in translation:

> Clement VII Supreme Pontiff presented this codex to me as a gift A D 1533, in Rome, after I had, in the presence of Fra Ursino, Cardinal Joh. Salviati, Joh. Petrus, Bishop of Viterbo, and Matthias Curtius medical physician, explained to him in the garden of the Vatican, Copernicus' teaching concerning the motion of the earth.
>
> Joh. Albertus Widmanstadius, cognomitatus Lucretius, personal familiar and secretary to our Most Serene Lord. (fig. 124).[99]

There thus exists conclusive evidence that knowledge of Copernicus' theories, *prior* to publication, was circulating not only in areas of Europe somewhat distant to Michelangelo, but also in the heart of the Vatican. As Pastor expresses it, 'the Pope [Clement VII] is entitled to special honour for the attitude he assumed towards the new system of Nicholas Copernicus,' and it is quite certain that Clement VII, Giulio de' Medici, the instigator of the Sistine *Last Judgment*, who was also a close friend and associate of his chosen artist Michelangelo, definitely knew about Copernicus' Sun–centred universe as early as 1533.[100]

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[98]See L. Prowe, *Nicholas Copernicus*, Berlin, 1883, vol. 1, p. 273; Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 5, p. 410; Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 387; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, pp. 336–337; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 155.

[99]The manuscript is now in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (Codex Graecus Monacensis, 151), dated '6. 33.' It is curious that no record of this event seems to have survived in the Vatican, and the destruction of documents at the time of the subsequent banning might even be speculated. For Widmanstadt, who was Papal secretary, see Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 387. The Latin text reads: Clemens VII Pontifex Maximus hunc codicem mihi dono dedit Anno MDXXXIII Romae, postquam ei, praesentibus Fr. Ursino, Joh. Salviato Cardinalibus, Joh. Petro episcopo Viterbiensi, et Mattaeo Curtio Medico physico, in hortis Vaticanis Copernicana de motu terrae sententiam explicavi. Joh. Albertus Widmanstadius cognomitatus Lucretius Serenissimi Domini Nostri Secretarius domesticus et familiaris. The inscription is also illustrated in H. Hauke, 'Bücher sind Gefässe der Erinnerung...' *Bayerland Kultur*, (3) Sept. 1986, pp. 18–21.

[100]For Clement and Copernicus, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, p. 336, and vol. 12, p. 549. For Clement and Michelangelo, see Vasari, *Lives*,(ed. de

Widmanstadt, it will be remembered, was an associate of Egidio da Viterbo (the probable theological adviser on the Sistine ceiling) and they had been involved in the publication of Hermetic writings together.[101] Although Koestler describes the manuscript which was given to Widmanstadt by the Pope as of little importance in itself, it seems significant that it was a copy of *On the Senses and Sensibilities* by the Greek philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose work was of some interest to the Renaissance Neoplatonists.[102] More importantly, bound in with this manuscript in the Munich Codex, and apparently part of the same 'gift,' is a copy of the *Elements of Physics* by the Neoplatonist Proclus, who exerted such an influence upon Ficino. This work is interestingly concerned with Neoplatonic concepts of infinity, circularity and circular motion.[103]

It is possible to make further deductions from the list of officials who attended the Vatican lecture, apart from Widmanstadt, and work out a more precise timing of the meeting. Since Johannes Petrus (Grassi) became Bishop of Viterbo on 6th June 1533,[104] and Clement VII left Rome to travel to attend negotiations in France on 9th September that year,[105] we can place the meeting at some point between June and early September 1533. Rosen suggests that the meeting was probably associated with the escalating interest in astronomy after the comet of the 18th June that year, so the date of the meeting can plausibly be narrowed even further.[106] The '6.33' below the inscription at the foot of the

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Vere) p. 1878; (ed. Bull) p. 373, and this chapter, below.

[101]See above, chapter 7, section vi.

[102]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 155. For the importance of Alexander of Aphrodisias, see Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 260 and 265, and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 140, where he comments on Alexander's view that intellectual light and God are identical.

[103]For which see Proclus, *Elements of Physics* (ed. H. Boese), Berlin: Akademie–Verlag, 1958. [A short tract by Michael of Ephesus is also included. The additional inscription notes that Pope Pius VI saw the manuscript in 1782].

[104]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 387 (Egidio da Viterbo died in 1533).

[105]Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, p. 231. This was in connection with the proposed marriage of the Pope's niece, Catherine de' Medici, and the French Prince.

[106]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 372–374 and 387. This was not Halley's comet, which had recently appeared in 1531 (Olson, 'Giotto's Portrait of

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[106]Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, pp. 372–374 and 387. This was not Halley's comet, which had recently appeared in 1531 (Olson, 'Giotto's Portrait of

manuscript page (fig. 124) suggests June itself; so a date between 18th and 30th June is quite probable. Michelangelo was in Rome in 1533 until the end of June when he left for his last visit to Florence.[107]

Apart from Michelangelo's close relationship and contact with Clement VII who had grown up with him in the Neoplatonic atmosphere of the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent (as had in fact Paul III, Farnese),[108] there also existed close links between Michelangelo and at least two of the other four members of the Curia who attended that lecture. Johannes Petrus succeeded Egidio at Viterbo, which was the centre for the movement of the *Spirituali* with whom Michelangelo was associated in the 1530's and 40's.[109] Cardinal Giovanni Salviati was the son of Michelangelo's close friend Jacopo Salviati, who was, in turn, son-in-law of Lorenzo the Magnificent.[110] Salviati was a leading Cardinal and also closely associated with Michelangelo through the distinguished circle of Florentine emigrés (*fuorusciti*) in Rome; Michelangelo had recently offered to give him a painting in 1531.[111] Even though the artist was not present himself at the lecture,

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Halley's Comet,' p. 137; E. M. Hulme, *The Renaissance, the Protestant Revolution and the Catholic Reformation*, New York: Appleton, 1915, chapter 20, 'The Turk, the Comet and the Devil,' especially pp. 405–407).

[107]Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. lxv and 183–185; Murray, *Michelangelo, his Life, Work and Times*, p. 155; H. Thode, *Michelangelo und das Ende der Renaissance*, Leipzig: Fischer and Wittig, 1962, vol. 1, p. 425.

[108]See Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, where he discusses Michelangelo's relationship with Clement VII, since their youth in the household of Lorenzo de' Medici (pp. 225–226, 238–240; see also Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 135, 142–143, 164, 169, 303). Michelangelo was readily forgiven for turning against the Medici while fighting for the Florentine Republic (Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 153). Paul III had also spent some time in Lorenzo's household, and was on friendly terms with the artist (*ibid.*, pp. 379, 384; Vasari, *Lives*, ed. de Vere, pp. 1880, 1889–1892; ed. Bull, pp. 378, 388–391).

[109]See above, chapter 5 *passim*, and Shrimplin-Evangelidis, 'Nicodemism.' Johannes Petrus, otherwise known as Gian Petro Grassi or Gratti, also held high office under Pope Paul III (Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 11, p. 231).

[110]See Ramsden, vol. 2, pp. 110–111, for family relationships and *passim* for Michelangelo and Jacopo Salviati (also Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 98). See Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, p. 61, and vol. 11, p. 314, for the importance of Cardinal Salviati under both Clement VII and Paul III. At a later date, Salviati seemed to be aware that Michelangelo's circular and centralized design for St Peter's was tantamount to 'making a temple in the image of the sun's rays,' (Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 291 and 309–310).

[111]For direct traceable links between Michelangelo and Cardinal Salviati, see De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 67 and n. 40 on p. 71; De Tolnay,

Michelangelo's knowledge was thus not dependent solely on his association with Clement VII but may also be attributed to his exposure to ideas current in the Papal court of the time where he ha' \ close contacts.

Far from it being 'impossible'[112] therefore for Michelangelo to have heard of the Copernican Sun–centred universe at the time of the *Last Judgment* fresco, it seems highly unlikely that he was ignorant of the theory. It is possible to compile a concrete list of people in Italy, within the higher reaches of the Catholic Church, who quite definitely knew of the theory and with whom Michelangelo came into close contact. Michelangelo's acquaintance with the ideas and discussion taking place in the Papal court, important as it is, is probably of lesser significance than his direct relationship with Clement VII, the initiator of the *Last Judgment* project. Clement's background does suggest that he was likely to have been interested in and receptive of such new ideas and to have permitted them to have an effect on important painted religious schemes. In his personal character, he has recently been described as, 'an Italian prince, a de' Medici and a diplomat first, a spiritual ruler afterwards,'[113] and Guicciardini, a near contemporary historian, characterized Clement as 'reputed to be a serious person, constant in his judgments...a man full of ambition, lofty–minded, restless and *most eager for innovation*' [my italics].[114]

Clement's sympathy with new ideas and reform of the church were shown by his friendly relations with Erasmus and the Capuchins, who showed an interest in the doctrine of Justification by Faith.[115] The concept that heretical ideas were

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Michelangelo, vol. 5, p. 175 (for the gift of the painting); *idem*, *Michelangelo*, 1975, p. 182; and Salmi, *Michelangelo Complete Works*, p. 578. The family of the other Cardinal present (Orsini) was closely related to the Medici by marriage (Lorenzo the Magnificent to Clarice Orsini). Matthias Curtius (1474–1544) was a Professor of medicine at Bologna and Padua (M. Cosenza, *Dictionary of Italian Humanists*, Boston: Hall, 1962, vol. 5, no. 588).

[112]As argued by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 49.

[113]*Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 27.

[114]F. Guicciardini, *The History of Italy* (trans. and ed. S. Alexander) New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984 (1st ed. 1561), p. 338.

[115]Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, p. 337 and p. 342f. for his patronage of the arts.

included in the fresco 'behind the very throne of the Pope' seems unlikely, therefore, since both Pope and artist alike sympathized with the movement for Catholic Reform and this was by no means heretical. Clement VII was evidently on good terms with Michelangelo, but neither he, nor his successor, was likely to have permitted the public expression in the Papal chapel of ideas of which they did not approve, whether of the Catholic Reform movement or of Copernican heliocentricity.

In spite of some confusion over the dating of the original commission for the fresco on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, and references to a scheme involving a *Resurrection* and a *Fall of the Rebel Angels*,[116] Vasari and Condivi both attest to the fact that Clement VII was the initiator of the project.[117] It should also be recalled that, after Clement's death in 1534, Pope Paul III took over the project but without significantly altering it.[118] It is also largely accepted that the commission was decided upon and discussed at the meeting between Pope Clement VII and Michelangelo at S Miniato al Tedesco on 22nd September, 1533.[119] This seems likely in view of the fact that Michelangelo spent most of the following year in Florence, returning to Rome only two days before Clement's death on 25th September, 1534.[120] It is also significant that Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, later Pope Paul III, whose pontificate saw the completion of the fresco after Clement's death, accompanied Clement VII on this journey and was also present at S Miniato, and perhaps at the actual meeting with Michelangelo.[121]

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[116]Especially the letter of Agnello concerning a '*resurrectione*' already referred to above, chapter 4. See De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 197; Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' p. 85f.; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 157; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 85f.

[117]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1882; (ed. Bull) p. 378; Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 75f.

[118]Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 157; De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 19. This is also confirmed by the Papal Breve of Paul III, reprinted in De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 97.

[119]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 19; De Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 25; Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 157, and above, chapter 4.

[120]Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. lxv; vol. 2, p. 176.

[121]Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, p. 231. Cardinal Farnese here replaced the

The discussion between Pope and artist about the Last Judgment commission thus took place remarkably soon after Clement VII had had Copernicus' theory explained to him by a professional lecturer. Widmanstadt had probably obtained his information from Theodoric of Radzyn, the representative of Copernicus' chapter of Varmia in Rome so a direct contact through a chain of no more than five persons is traceable between Michelangelo and Copernicus in mid–1533, at *exactly* the time of the commission of the *Last Judgment* (namely, Copernicus, Radzyn, Widmanstadt, Clement and/or Salviati, Michelangelo).[122] Even though Clement's knowledge of the theory does not necessarily confirm his approval, the circumstances surrounding the lecture do strongly suggest this probability.

x) Paul III and the Heresy Question

After Clement VII died, the Vatican continued to show an interest in Copernican ideas. Subsequent to the meeting in the Vatican garden, another Cardinal, Nicholas Schönberg,[123] wrote a direct letter to Copernicus in 1536, urging him to publish his theory (see Appendix III).[124] The actual painting of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco commenced in the early summer of that year, so Schönberg's letter, dated 1st November, 1536 could be viewed as an urgent request for further information as the fresco got underway. A possible relationship between Schönberg's request and the painting of the fresco appears particularly likely in view of Pope Paul's *motu proprio* forbidding Michelangelo to

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recently deceased Jacopo Salviati as Pope Clement's trusted adviser.

[122]For Radzyn and Widmanstadt, see Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 3[illegible]. It is important also to recall Copernicus' statement in his Preface to *Revolutions* (written in 1542) that the work had been dormant for 'nine years.' This appears to be a reference to its discussion in the Vatican in 1533.

[123]For Schönberg, see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 10, pp. 38, 61. Schönberg was at the negotiations for the Treaty of Cambrai, 1529, together with Salviati and was promoted to Cardinal by Paul III in 1535 at the same time as the Catholic Reformer, Contarini (*ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 142).

[124]Schönberg's letter is to be found printed in full in Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. xvii; and Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 154–155. It was included in the printed versions of *Revolutions* in 1543. (See also Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, p. 549).

undertake any other work, which was dated the same month, 17th November, 1536.[125] The letter itself (reproduced here, Appendix III), perhaps written with the assistance of Widmanstadt who had become Schönberg's secretary in 1534,[126] makes it absolutely clear that for several years Copernicus' hypothesis had been regarded as common knowledge, that his talent was recognized by the Catholic Church and that the Vatican itself was urging him to 'publish and communicate this discovery of yours to scholars' as soon as possible. Schönberg's comment, 'Some years ago word reached me concerning your proficiency of which everybody constantly spoke,' shows clearly how well known Copernicus' theories were at the time in such circles, and he mentions his high regard of Copernicus and the latter's prestige. Schönberg's letter summarises Copernicus' achievement of placing the sun in the central place in the universe and its relation to ancient and new ideas and he also demonstrates his knowledge of the fact that Copernicus had already 'written a treatise' in detail on the whole system (Appendix III). Theodoric of Reden (or Radzyn) is mentioned by Schönberg as the direct contact with Copernicus, and he had been requested to arrange for the manuscript to be copied at the Cardinal's expense. Schönberg's concluding comments on Copernicus' 'fine talent and reputation' shows clearly that knowledge of and interest in the Sun–centred universe continued in the Curia after the initial 'lecture' and during the period that Michelangelo's fresco was being painted. It seems unlikely that an important Cardinal like Schönberg would have been acting against the wishes of the then Pope Paul III, instead of according to his instructions in these matters.[127] Thus, after the death of Clement VII in 1534, interest in Copernicus remained unabated in the Vatican.

'Approval' rather than mere 'knowledge' in Vatican circles in the 1530's is suggested and this seems to have continued as Paul III took over patronage of Michelangelo's fresco from his predecessor Clement VII. The Farnese Pope,

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[125]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 20–21; De Campos, *Michelangelo*, p. 97.
[126]Rose, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 387.
[127]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 155.

perhaps to be viewed as the 'Last Renaissance Pope,' was a humanist and lover of the arts at the same time as being a spiritual religious leader and something of a reformer.[128] He had a close relationship with Michelangelo, since he also, as mentioned, shared a similar [illegible]ound.[129] Paul III was on good terms with members of the Catholic reformation during the early years of his pontificate and it was Paul III who raised members of the *Spirituali* like Pole and Contarini to the rank of Cardinal. The stricter measures introduced during his rule, such as the Roman Inquisition (1542) and the *Index of Prohibited Books* (1549), did not take place until after the completion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco. The strict phase of the Counter Reformaton and direct persecution of heretics did not really assume significant proportions until the 1550's with the election of Pope Paul IV Carafa.[130]

After Pope Paul III assumed control, he insisted on Michelangelo pursuing the commission of the fresco for the altar wall of the Sistine chapel, but the original design of the fresco was not altered in any significant way.[131] In spite of this, there has nevertheless been some discussion in the literature as to whether a change in commission took place with the accession of the new Pope, which has in turn been related to the references to a scheme for a *Resurrection*, mentioned above. Liebert suggested that Clement VII's original proposal was for the *Resurrection of Christ* on the altar wall and the *Fall of the Rebel Angels* at the

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[128]Pastor, *History of the Popes*, especially vol. 11, *passim*; Hale, *Encyclopaedia of Italian Renaissance*, p. 241; Armitage, *Sun, Stand thou Still*, pp. 132–133.

[129]For Michelangelo and Pope Paul III, see Liebert, *Psychoanalytic Study*, pp. 331, 379 and above, n. 108; also Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 91 (Michelangelo sent him a gift of 33 pears).

[130]The first changes took place around 1542, but mildness was again experienced in 1549 when Cardinal Pole narrowly missed election to the Papacy, and under Julius III (1550–1555). The strict phase of the Counter–Reformation received impetus from the election of Paul IV Carafa (1555–1559). For background, see Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*; Cantimori, 'Italy and the Papacy,' in *New Cambridge Modern History* (ed. Elton), vol. 2, and other references cited in chapter 5, section ii, above.

[131]Even the proposal to include the Farnese coat of arms was not followed through. (Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 83).

entrance, and that it was Paul III who, at this stage, altered the commission.[132] The idea of an alteration in the plan at this late stage is discounted by the Papal Breve of Paul III, which clearly shows that no such change was intended.[133]

As the fresco progressed towards its completion according to the design as formulated by Michelangelo between 1533 and 1536, it becomes clear that Paul III showed approval of the way the commission was carried out. Pope Paul's appointment in October 1543 of a superintendent for the preservation of the paintings in the Sistine Chapel confirms his view of the paintings' worth as also does the fact that the *Last Judgment* was barely finished when, in November 1541, he followed with another commission for Michelangelo to paint the frescoes in the Pauline Chapel. He was obviously impervious to the early criticism of the fresco by men like Biagio da Cesena.[134]

By implication, Paul III also exhibited tacit approval of the idea of the heliocentric universe, since Rheticus' summary of Copernicus' theory, the *Narratio Prima* (mentioned already above), was allowed to appear in print in 1540, and did not meet with any opposition on publication. It ran to a second edition almost immediately the following year (1541).[135] Rheticus firmly linked the new hypothesis with Neoplatonic thought as well as with Christian ideals; he even linked the astronomical theories with the very theme of the *Last Judgment* and 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'[136] No opposition to this was forthcoming from the Vatican, and it appears that, in spite of objections like the contradiction of commonsense observation, the Copernican system which placed the sun instead of

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[132]Liebert, *Michelangelo, A Psychoanalytic Study*, pp. 331–333.

[133]Vasari, *Lives*, (ed. de Vere) p. 1879; (ed. Bull) p. 374, mentions an original scheme of a *Last Judgment* on the altar wall, and the *Fall of Lucifer* on the opposite wall which was simply not executed. It is possible that an original combination of a *Resurrection* and *Fall*, with its obvious emphasis on the 'Up for Heaven/ down for Hell' connotations, was abandoned in the light of the new cosmology of which Clement had just learned.

[134]Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 12, pp. 615 and 631. For Michelangelo's Pauline frescoes, see De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 70–77.

[135]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 161–169.

[136]Rheticus, *Narratio Prima*, in Rosen, *Three Copernican Treatises*, p. 122.

the earth at the centre of the planetary system, was perceived to have merit as an exciting innovation which appealed to and was understood by astronomers, scholars and clergy.

When Copernicus' *Revolutions* finally appeared in print in 1543, it was, as has been mentioned, with the dedication and preface addressed to Pope Paul III (see Appendix IV). Considering the implication of a dedication and the more severe atmosphere after reintroduction of the Roman Inquisition in 1542, tacit approval of the ideas is indicated. Increasingly strict regulations concerning the Papal *imprimatur*[137] had come into effect during the decade following the completion of Michelangelo's fresco but the Pope seems not to have objected to the publication of the work or to his name in the dedication, for he took no action. The fact that no official action was taken against Copernicus's ideas by the Pope at this stage is crucial to our understanding of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. Indices of Prohibited Books were in preparation from the 1540's, but even under Carafa's sweeping controls after he became Pope Paul IV in 1555, when works by Savonarola, Boccaccio, Aretino and even Dante were banned, Copernicus' book was left unmolested and not prohibited until 1616.[138]

In his preface, addressed to Paul III, Copernicus takes pains to point out

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[137]P. F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

[138]*De Revolutionibus* was finally removed from the Catholic Index in 1845. It is necessary at this point to address Rosen's paper 'Was Copernicus' *Revolutions* approved by the Pope?' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36, 1975, pp. 531–542 (cf. also Rosen's comments in Dobrzycki (ed.) *De Revolutionibus*, pp. 336–337). Rosen puts forward evidence that Friar Tolosani, supported by Bartolommeo Spina, Master of the Sacred Palace responsible for the censorship of unsuitable works, had suggested the banning of *Revolutions* in 1544. According to Rosen, this implies that Paul III therefore did not approve of the book (p. 542). However, this evidence, while demonstrating that small pockets of anti–Copernicanism did exist in 1544, rather proves the opposite. Namely, that even when someone as important and influential as the Master of the Sacred Palace suggested condemning the book, neither Pope Paul III, nor any of his immediate successors (including Paul IV Carafa) took any action. The subject was not even raised at the Council of Trent (A. D. Wright, *The Counter–Reformation*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p. 107; Garin, 'Alle origini della Polemica AntiCopernicana,' in *Rinascite e Rivoluzioni*, pp. 283–296), and the fact remains that the book was not prohibited until 1616. With regard to the present hypothesis, this episode of 1544, in any case, postdates the completion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.

that he was encouraged in his work not only by eminent scholars, but also by a cardinal (Schönberg) and two bishops (Tiedemann Giese of Chelmno and Paul of Middelburg, Bishop of Fossombrone). That Copernicus received encouragement from members of the Catholic Church in pursuing and finally publishing his ideas is not disputable, and it is important to remember that he was a canon of the Church himself. Aware of apparent illogicalties in his scheme and the fact that the motion of the earth appeared contrary to sense perception, Copernicus stated his reasons for not publishing sooner as fear of ridicule by the ignorant, *not* fear of the Church.

As Copernicus' work was about to be printed, the publisher, Osiander, added an extra preface. Addressed to the reader, this has as a major theme a discussion of the difference between truth and hypothesis, and suggests that Copernicus' work was to be regarded as a useful working hypothesis rather than a factual account of the system of the universe. Since the theory was, at the time, not provable, Osiander's preface seems to indicate some fear of criticism.[139] Osiander, almost certainly without Copernicus' consent or approval, presented heliocentricity as an interesting hypothesis, rather than as truth, in order perhaps to avert condemnation from the church. But it must be remembered that Osiander was a Protestant and the Protestants were more clearly opposed to the theory. Acting with the best of intentions, he was also concerned, as publisher, with his potential market amongst a far wider audience.[140]

During the years 1533–41 which saw the inception and completion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Copernicus' theory of the Sun–centred universe

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[139]Osiander's preface is reprinted in full in Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, p. xvi. For discussion of its inclusion and significance, see Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 170–175; Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, p. 187; Hallyn, *Poetic Structure*, pp. 49–52.

[140]Osiander was probably also responsible for the 'sales talk' on the cover page (Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, pp. xv, and p. 334). Useful for summary of these events is F. C. Copleston, *History of Philosophy, The Philosophy of the Renaissance*, London; Burn and Oates, 1960, vol. 3, 'The Scientific Movement of the Renaissance,' pp. 282–287.

was not only well known in the Vatican, but quite simply not regarded as being in conflict with Catholic Church doctrine. It is possible that the new idea had an easy passage at first because Copernican theory was presented as an 'hypothesis' (owing to Osiander's Preface), and it did work well, to 'save the appearances.' However, as demonstrated, Copernicus evidently regarded his theory as 'truth' and it was unlikely to have been presented otherwise at the 'Vatican lecture.' The Roman Catholic Church never persecuted or ridiculed Copernicus or his followers at this stage. *Revolutions* was read and occasionally taught at Catholic universities and when the Catholic Church Calendar was eventually reformed under Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, it was based on Rheinhold's interpretations of Copernicus' observations.[141] The work of Kepler and Tycho Brahe[142] and the persecution of Bruno[143] and Galileo[144] followed much later. It is important not to be

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[141]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 216; Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 187, 196; Bienkowska (ed.) *World of Copernicus*, p. 124; Heniger, *Cosmographical Glass*, chapter 3, 'Copernicus and his Consequences for Immediate Recognition,' pp. 45–60; D. Stimson, *The Gradual Acceptance of the Copernican Theory of the Universe*, Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1972.

[142]For Kepler and Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), see Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 200–219. Although outside this period of study, it is of interest that Neoplatonic influence on the formation of the heliocentric theory and modern cosmology is also very evident in the work of Kepler (1571–1630). Pauli shows how Kepler's championing of Copernicanism was not only attributable to scientific reasoning, but also to Kepler's interest in the symbolic analogy he saw between the role of the sun in the universe and the Divine Mind. This demonstrates continuing interest in Neoplatonism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (C. G. Jung and W. Pauli. *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*, New York: Pantheon, 1955, cited by G. Santillana, *The Age of Adventure. The Renaissance Philosophers*. New York: Mentor, 1957, pp. 201–202; Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, part 4).

[143]The career of Bruno has been mentioned above, chapter 7. Also outside the period of discussion is the *Discourse* of Cardinal Bérulle of 1644, where christocentricism and heliocentricism are discussed in the theological context. It is of note that the Sun–Deity analogy is still very strongly expressed, as in 'Jesus est le vray Soleil qui nous regarde des rayons de sa lumière....Disons maintenant qu'il est le Soleil,' and so on (see C. Ramnoux, 'Héliocentrisme et Christocentrisme,' in Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil*, pp. 447–461; Hallyn, *Poetic Struture*, pp. 141–145).

[144]For basic information on Galileo, see Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, pp. 219–225, and Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, part 5. See Garin, *Astrology*, pp. 9–11 on the influence of the Solar cults on Kepler and Galileo. Yates ('Hermetic Tradition,' ed. Singleton, p. 271f.) emphasizes the complexities of the transition from Renaissance philosophy to modern science and celestial mechanics; and the way in which Kepler, Galileo and Newton 'grew out of' the Pythagorean, Platonic and Hermetic traditions of the Renaissance.

blinded by hindsight in our knowledge of what later happened to the adherents of Copernicanism.[145]

In Medieval thought, the earth was regarded as central and man's existence and salvation as the central event; the idea that the sun was central and immobile while the earth hurtled through space was regarded as absurd. The realization that the earth was merely a planet like many others that rotated around the sun, in an apparently infinite universe, came increasingly under consideration and did eventually shatter theological understanding.[146] The placement of Heaven and Hell had to be considered as symbolic, rather than astronomical or geographical. The church then prohibited the teaching which placed the sun as the centre of the universe – but not at the time at which Michelangelo painted the *Last Judgment*. Seen against the tremendous interest in the sun – in theology, literature and philosophy – which has been demonstrated above, and which served as background to Copernicus in the same way as to Michelangelo, the identification of God with the sun made the heliocentric theory the logical next step towards a solution of the anomalies of the haidocentric nature of the spherical geocentric system. It is therefore erroneous to suggest that it would have been either impossible or heretical for Michelangelo to have incorporated this concept into his great fresco, and the depiction of Christ as the Sun in the centre of the circular format is clearly the overriding theme, not an incidental feature. As with the earlier examples of the *Last Judgment* examined in chapter 3 above, just as before, the ordering of the complex scene was achieved by relating it to the contemporary view of the cosmological structure of the universe. It was simply the cosmological framework which had changed. The implication of

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[145]For further reading material and references for man's view of the universe, before, during and after the Renaissance, a useful source of information is B. G. Dick, 'An Interdisciplinary Science–Humanities Course,' *American Journal of Physics*, 51 (8), August 1983, pp. 702–708, which contains an extensive further bibliography.

[146]Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 220–222; White, *History of Warfare of Science and Theology*, especially chapter 3, 'The war upon Galileo,' and chapter 4, 'Theological efforts to crush the scientific view'; B. Russell, *Religion and Science*; J. W. Draper, *Religion and Science*.

this hypothesis is that the relationship between figure 1 and figure 2 is the same as that between figure 15 and figure 14.

Set against the demonstrable theological and philosophical interests of the time in cosmology and Sun–symbolism, the revelation of Copernicus' scientific theory acted as a precipitating factor to cause these concepts to fall into their rightful place. The idea of placing God personified as the Sun in the centre of the universe solved the inconsistency in the Christian tradition of equating the Deity with the sun – which, in the flat–earth or geocentric view was merely a minor and fluctuating cosmological feature. Man, it is true, had been taken away from his central place in the universe; but God was far more logically placed there instead. The traditional analogy between Sun and Deity was vindicated at last.

Chapter 9

The Central Point

> And on his vesture and on his thigh was a name written,
> KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.
>
> Revelations 19:16.

i) Art Historical Method

In Copernicus' theory of the heliocentric universe, as in the theological, philosophical and literary source material provided above, the idea predominates of placing at the centre of the physical universe that body which is most naturally to be regarded as the counterpart of the Deity, namely the Sun. The kind of source material which demonstrates the prevalence and popularity of this concept in the first half of the sixteenth century has been examined for its direct relevance and availability for Michelangelo. Sources in the Scriptures and the Church Fathers, in Ficino and Dante are all generally accepted and documented as influential upon the artist: here they have simply been examined from a different point of view. The *new* source of influence which is claimed, namely that of Copernicus' theory, is precisely documented and fits in well with the chronology of the commissioning of the fresco. Taken together, these sources correspond very neatly to the visual aspects of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco. The hypothesis that Sun–symbolism and cosmology play a major role in the overall interpretation and design of the work does not rest on obscure argument or improbable and unproven source material.

However, while this interdisciplinary approach, which would appear to correspond with what we know of the sixteenth–century way of thinking, is important in the study of a single work of this magnitude, it is also important not to lose sight of the art–work itself. Using the 'tools' of the art historian rather than the historian, it is necessary to return to the methods of art history rather than the history of ideas and to look once more at the strictly formal aspects of the painting

itself,[1] considered in relation to the techniques of fresco construction which were used during the Renaissance.

ii) The Centralized format around Christ

The cosmological interpretion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* outlined above argues that the circular emphasis of the design of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco is centred on Christ depicted in terms of a Christian and Neoplatonic Sun–symbol and influenced by Copernican heliocentricity. This assessment, having as its starting point the composition of the work itself, forms a prime example of how the formal analysis of a painting may be used as a point of departure for an iconological interpretation. The metaphysical or transcendental concept of the circular universe centred on a single point was stressed in the source material provided by the works of Augustine, Dante and Ficino; the description of the physical universe centred on the sun forms the core of Copernicus' scientific theory. Thus far in this hypothesis the central, pivotal point of the universe has been read broadly as the figure of Christ, in the guise of the Sun, in Michelangelo's fresco. Yet, if the principles of formal analysis are more precisely applied and related to knowledge of Renaissance fresco technique, it should be possible to locate, even more specifically, the 'single indivisible and stationary point' (Ficino)[2] on which 'depend the heavens and the whole of nature' (Dante).[3] In turn, it might also be possible to discover some further meaning or implications in the way in which the formal construction of the fresco might have been carried out, for it is necessary for any theological or philosophical reading and interpretation of the central theme of the fresco to fit in precisely with the physical ordering and centrality of the fresco itself.

A brief reconsideration of our sources reminds us that not only the circle but also its central point was of great importance. In the Neoplatonic cosmology of

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[1]Discussed above, chapter 4, section ii.

[2]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 47 (see above, chapter 7, section iv).

[3]Dante, *Paradiso* XXVIII, 41–42.

Ficino, the central point of the universe was emphasized and this is clearly equated throughout with God. In addition, Ficino considers the nature of the 'point' itself in very specific terms which can be recalled:

> The centre of the circle is a point, single, indivisible and motionless. From it, many lines, which are divisible and mobile, are drawn out to the circumference which is like them. This divisible circumference revolves around the centre as its axis.[4]

The point is emphasized as the centre or generating point both of the circles and of the rays of the universe. These concepts are related to the Platonic cosmology expressed in *Timaeus* where the importance of the single point which generates the circular cosmology is stressed[5] (see figs. 52, 53). In Christian terms, the writings of St Augustine, strongly influenced by Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts, show a similar emphasis in the discussion of the circle as the most perfect form and, also, in the significance of the central point of the circle and the role it plays in the generation of this perfection.[6]

Such ideas were also taken up by Dante, as he apparently became aware of the difficulties of combining the newly accepted spherical earth with the concept of Heaven above and Hell beneath the earth's surface. This would have rendered Hell the centre of the universe and thus the focus around which the earth and heavens revolved. Finding this unacceptable, Dante introduced a separate 'point' in the Empyrean around which all the Heavens revolved 'in perfect, eternal, circular motion'. This point he describes as a source of light, the focal point of the universe, analogized with the Deity.[7] In addition, apart from the idea of the circle and its central point, in his interpretation of heaven and earth, Dante also often refers to

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[4]Ficino, *De Amore*, p. 47.

[5]Plato, *Timaeus* 37A, 62D.

[6]Augustine, *On the Magnitude of the Soul*, ed. cit. p. 80 (' what else is the regulator of this symmetry than the point placed in the center? Much can be said of the function of the point.') See above, chapter 5. This concept has recently been reiterated by Umberto Eco in his reference to 'the Only Fixed Point in the universe...one single point, a pivot, bolt or hook around which the universe could move' (*Foucault's Pendulum*, p. 5, also pp. 206–207).

[7]Dante, *Paradiso* XXVIII, 16f. (above, chapter 6, section v).

the diagonal lines, or 'rays' which extend from this point to earth.[8]

In the scientific realm, Copernicus' writings refer to the sun as the centre of the universe (fig. 2) surely a more logical hypothesis for its construction. Yet, in a later section of *De Revolutionibus*, Copernicus also refers to the existence of a specific or generating point for the universe and the orbits of the planets (including the earth).[9] To account for certain features in the astronomical data, Copernicus too employed the concept of a generating point, adjacent to but not quite situated in the centre of the sun.[10]

It should be noted in the dicussion of these sources that the cosmologies outlined here do, of course, vary in detail although they share much common ground in basic overall scheme. It has already been pointed out that Ficino frequently refers to either four or five cosmic areas, or he describes four circles.[11] Plato describes eight and Dante nine (fig. 94).[12] Elsewhere (in *Timaeus*, again) Plato describes two circles which interlock in the form of a Greek letter chi (*X*).[13] Dante's scheme contained nine concentric circles in the heavens, Copernicus' scheme (fig. 2) contains seven, plus the moon's epicycle. Michelangelo's fresco is basically divided into two main circles plus various subsidiary areas, but it should again be stressed that we are here dealing with the Sun–centred *idea* and Michelangelo's own subtle synthesis of religious, philosophical and scientific themes. The idea of the Sun–Deity at the centre of the universe is of primary concern, rather than any precise analogy to a specific number of circles, which might suggest a privileged position for one of the sources suggested. It is not possible, nor necessary, to force his fresco into one concrete scheme. The rigid following of one selected scheme or number of circles was

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[8]*Paradiso* XXIII, 72, 79–80.

[9]Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, book 3, chapter 25, pp. 169 and 242–243.

[10]Copernicus' later suggestion of a 'point' as the centre of the planetary orbits appears to have been an attempt on his part to account for certain irregularities, which were caused by the real nature of the orbits which are in fact elliptical (this being discovered and calculated by Kepler, see Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, pp. 328–338).

[11]Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 47–48.

[12]See Plato, *Republic* (ed. Radice) Appendix, p. 402 with diagram, p. 405. Compare Dante, *Paradiso* (ed. Mandelbaum), p. 305.

[13]Plato, *Timaeus*, 36C.

of less importance than the synthesis of a number of current concepts or ideas into Michelangelo's own unique interpretation.[14]

Although there is some variation in detail, common to all the schemes discussed is the idea of a very specific point, the centre of both circles and diagonal 'rays' which occurs in such sources as have already been argued for Michelangelo's fresco. In spite of all the references in the literature to the design of the fresco as 'circular,' and the general acceptance of Christ's central position,[15] no attempt has been made to complete the formal analysis to see whether it is possible to determine a more precise centre or 'point' for the design, other than the figure of Christ, nor whether this might have any particular significance.[16]

Although an artist of calibre belonging to any age, must be able to draw or compose a circular design freehand when on a small scale,[17] a work of the size of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* must surely have required some more technical basis in order to achieve the required effect of the visual impact of the figure of Christ centrally placed in a composition which consists chiefly of the two main concentric circles, inner and outer (see figs 1, 52). This would surely imply a fixed central point for the fresco's construction.[18] As far as the diagonal elements are concerned, the same principles would apply. The diagonals similarly appear to centre on the figure of Christ and some attempt has been made in this case, more so perhaps than with

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[14]The planets, for example, do not figure in *Last Judgment* iconography and it is therefore not relevant to force correspondences with planetary orbits or to look for analogies with Venus, Mercury and so on in Michelangelo's fresco. The Copernican reference (above chapter 1, note 1) to the sun surrounded by Heavenly bodies or stars [*astrorum*] would seem to correspond well in Michelangelo's fresco with the Neoplatonic concept of the transmutation of souls into stars after death.

[15]For general comment on the formal design of the fresco by other writers, see chapter 4, sections iii–v (especially Wölfflin, Stendhal, Steinberg, etc.).

[16]For example, Lamarche–Vadel has described 'a series of concentric circles' but without making any attempt to determine their single centre (Lamarche–Vadel, *Michelangelo*, p. 136). Very recently, Greenstein has commented freely on the 'inner circle' and Christ in the 'center of the double round,' showing total acceptance of the idea without the necessity of formal analysis. (Greenstein, "How Glorious the Second Coming of Christ," p. 35).

[17]Giotto's 'O' may be recalled (Vasari, *Lives*, ed. de Vere, pp. 104–105; ed. Bull, pp. 64–65).

[18]Beck's comment on the *Last Judgment*, '...the geometry is only approximate...' must here come under discussion (Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, p. 341).

the circles, to trace the underlying geometry of the composition. Wölfflin had placed Christ at the centre of the two major diagonals which intersect the fresco in the form of a great X (or Greek chi, the symbol of Christ, *Χριστος*), and Steinberg has commented further on the existence of diagonals and published diagrammatic overlays of the fresco to demonstrate his interpretation.[19]

More detailed analysis will be necessary here, to discover whether, by returning to the formal analysis (as in chapter 4) and pursuing it to its logical conclusion, it is possible to establish the specific location of a particular point which generates the circularity of the fresco's composition, – that is, more precisely than simply the figure of Christ. The relationship between the formal analysis of a completed fresco and its method of construction should be considered in order to determine how the final effect was obtained.

iii) Fresco construction – Formal and iconological

Michelangelo's decision to paint the altar wall of the Sistine chapel in fresco, like the ceiling, seems to have been related to his attitude towards oil painting which became well known.[20] Michelangelo's use of drawings to evolve the design has been mentioned above, chapter 4, and his use of cartoons (pricked for transfer) affixed to individual areas of the fresco wall has been much discussed and well documented, on the ceiling also.[21] But the manner in which the overall circular emphasis of the composition was achieved in fresco on such a large wall surface has

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[19]Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, pp. 197–198. Steinberg, 'Line of Fate,' pp. 105–109, fig. 19. Steinberg concentrates on what he peceives as the bar sinister in Michelangelo's paintings including the *Last Judgment*. In a slightly later paper ('Corner of the *Last Judgment*, especially pp. 237–241 and plates V, VII, IX), he traces further diagonal lines and movement in the *Last Judgment*, from the angels to Christ, passing through the flayed skin and ending on the genitalia of Minos to which he gives his own unique interpretation.

[20]Michelangelo did not regard oil painting highly and fell out with Sebastiano del Piombo over the matter when the wall was at first prepared for oil painting (De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 21).

[21]De Campos, *Michelangelo's Last Judgment*, plate LXIV. Michelangelo is not known to have used the method of 'squaring' up a design for a large fresco. Hirst has recently commented on the difficulty of finding 'a satisfactory explanation of how he scaled up his designs,' (M. Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 8).

not been sufficiently examined.

The compositional use of circles and diagonals renders order to the fresco, but such features could not be sketched in free-hand. In the construction of a fresco of this size,[22] certain mathematical and constructional devices would have been utilized. This is especially likely in the work of Michelangelo, well known for his mathematical and architectural designs.[23] It is also unlikely that either the compositional design or the actual basis of its construction would have been chosen fortuitously.

The manner of construction of a large design on a wall surface often suggests the dividing up of the surface into separate areas to be treated, as might have been used, for example at Torcello (fig. 20), but Michelangelo's fresco suggests some centralized system. Vitruvius described the manner of construction of a centralized design where all points converge to a single point and these ideas were taken up in the Renaissance by writers like Alberti, Ghiberti, Pacioli and Filarete – and often linked with the science of optics.[24] Perhaps the most useful source of information for the techniques of fresco construction during the period of the Italian Renaissance, is Cennino Cennini's *Il Libro dell'Arte*.[25] Relevant here are Cennini's instructions concerning the techniques of fresco painting. Although Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is exceptional as one of the largest areas of wall surface to be decorated with a single image at that time, the same principles may be seen to apply. Cennini gives detailed instructions concerning fresco painting in section 3 of his book,

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[22]13.7 x 12.2m.

[23]Pirina, 'Michelangelo and the Music and Mathematics of his time,' pp. 368–382. In the curves of the staircase of the Laurentian Library, the designs for the dome of St. Peter's or for the piazza of the Campidoglio, mathematical 'tools' must have been used.

[24]Vitruvius, *Ten Books of Architecture*, discussed by J. White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, (3rd ed.) London: Faber and Faber, 1987, p. 252. For Alberti, Pacioli, Filarete etc., see Gilbert, *Sources and Documents* (ed. Janson), pp. 54–55; Wittkower, *Architectural Principles, passim.*

[25]The earliest copy is dated 1437. See C. J. Herringham (trans.), *The Book of the Art of Cennino Cennini*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1922, and D. V. Thompson (trans.) *Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, The Craftsman's Handbook*, New York: Dover, 1933.

especially chapters 67 – 88.[26] In the first of these, he describes carefully how to prepare the wall itself, make a design and then transfer it to the wall surface. The design should be marked on the *intonaco*, and cartoons or grids were often affixed to the wall surface and the design 'pricked' through or dusted over with chalk for each day's area of work.[27] For the marking out of larger areas or longer lines, such as the diagonals or orthogonals used in schemes of one–point perspective, Cennini indicates that stretched strings coated with chalk should be used which, being struck, would mark the wall. The use of plumb–lines is advocated for verticals, especially where fresco is concerned, in the ordering of the scene on a large wall surface: 'The perpendicular line by means of which the horizontal one is obtained must be made with a plumb–line.'[28] An emphasis is also laid on the use of compasses in the method of construction, both for the creation of parallel lines as well as circles themselves.[29] The general use of this method is well known and can easily be detected in the works of Quattrocento artists known for their frescoes, like Masaccio, Piero della Francesca and Ghirlandaio.

In Quattrocento fresco painting, the use of compasses, plumb lines and stretched strings was linked to the use of the system of one point perspective, as developed by Alberti, Brunelleschi and others.[30] The method of using vertical plumb lines or fixed 'snapped' lines which converged at a single point was linked to the idea of using linear perspective, where orthogonals met at the vanishing point, as an organizational method. In Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* there is obviously no use of a converging grid of orthogonals in the Quattrocento manner, but the idea of the use

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[26]See Herringham, *Cennini*, pp. 55–78; Thompson, *Craftsman's Handbook*, pp. 42–57.

[27]See D. V. Thompson, *The Materials and Techniques of Medieval Painting*, New York: Dover, 1956, pp. 69–73. The application of this method can be seen on the Sistine Ceiling as a result of the recent cleaning (Jeffery, 'Renaissance for Michelangelo,' p. 705).

[28]Herringham, *Cennino Cennini*, p. 56; Thompson, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, p. 43.

[29]Thompson, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, n. 3 on p. 43.

[30]See White, *Birth and Rebirth*, especially chapter 8; E. Panofsky, '*I Primi Lumi*. Italian Trecento Painting,' in *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 114–161, especially p. 123f.

of such constructional devices in the method of organisation and in the transference of designs remains highly relevant to fresco painting of large surfaces.[31]

Masaccio's *Trinity* is an early example of the rigorous use of linear perspective, and the method of its construction is based on multiple vanishing points in the vicinity of about spectator eye–level at the base of the Cross. Incisions are still visible in the plaster and compass marks denote the position from which the central plumbline was suspended.[32] Masaccio's use of plumb lines as part of his working method is also clear in his frescoes of the *Tribute Money* and the *Raising of Tabitha*. In the former, the perspective seems to have been organized from the vanishing point to the right of Christ's head: in the latter, a nail–hole corresponds with the vanishing point of the perspective, to the right of the strolling gentlemen. Vertical lines made by 'snapped cords' establish the verticality of the figures, and, according to Borsook, 'This is the earliest known instance of the use of plumb lines as an aid to make figures stand firmly on their feet – a practice which has since become the stock–in–trade of every art school.'[33] Roskill has also recently drawn attention to Masaccio's use of plumb lines in his frescoes, emphasizing the use of stretched pieces of chalk–coated string.[34]

Borsook draws attention to evidence of this type of fresco construction and the use of plumb lines in her detailed discussions of the technique of several other Quattrocento artists.[35] More importantly for Michelangelo, Borsook demonstrates

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[31]Such mechanical aids to drawing are discussed in F. Dubery and J. Willats, *Perspective and other drawing systems*, London: Herbert, 1983 (note especially fig. 73, showing Dürer's use of plumb lines); W. M. Ivins, *Art and Geometry. A Study in Space Institutions*, New York: Dover, 1946.

[32]E. Borsook, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany. From Cimabue to Andrea del Sarto*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1980, pp. 60–61 and fig. 7. See also P. Thuillier, 'Espace et Perspective au Quattrocento, *La Recherche*, no. 160, 1984, pp. 1384–1398, especially fig. 1; L. Wright, *Perspective in Perspective*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, pp. 60–61; and S. Sandstrom, *Levels of Unreality: Studies in Structure and Construction in Italian Mural Painting during the Renaissance*, Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1963, p. 29.

[33]Borsook, *Mural Painters*, p. 65.

[34]M. Roskill, *What is Art History?* London: Thames and Hudson, 1982, p. 51.

[35]Borsook, *Mural Painters*, for example, p. 82 (the work of the Prato Master); p. 124 (Filippo Lippi).

how the method continued into the late fifteenth century and has particularly been detected and commented on in the work of Ghirlandaio, to whom Michelangelo was apprenticed for a short while and from whom he surely learned the methods of fresco painting.[36] Borsook shows how Ghirlandaio made use of plumb lines in the manner described by Cennini, as in the Sassetti Chapel frescoes, where the technique has clearly been used. In *The Confirmation of the Rule of St Francis*, the nail–holes from which cords were suspended are visible in a detail of the Loggia dei Signori (fig. 125).[37] These nail holes provided the vanishing point for the orthogonals, as well as the point from which the circumferences of the painted arches were sprung. Similar nail holes are also traceable in the scene below (they converge on the man on horseback), and in other frescoes by Ghirlandaio such as the *Visitation*, and the *Birth of the Virgin* in Sta Maria Novella.[38]

As White points out, the underlying geometrical construction was of crucial importance in large–scale frescoes, but the vanishing point frequently did not coincide with any specific object of importance.[39] However, as White also points out, such compositional devices came to be used to enhance the narrative or symbolic meaning, as well as being used as a powerful means of pictorial organisation in increasing the unity of the composition and creating fictive space. White comments on the use of such a central point to highlight particular areas of importance in works like Masaccio's *Tribute Money*, Donatello's *Resurrection of Drusiana* or

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[36]Michelangelo minimized the extent to which he had learned from others (Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*, p. 10) but Vasari points out the documentary evidence of his apprenticeship with Ghirlandaio and also tells us how Michelangelo had made sketches of the process of fresco construction (Vasari, *Lives*, ed. de Vere, p. 1833–1835; ed. Bull, pp. 327–329). See also E. Fahy, 'Michelangelo and Ghirlandaio,' in I. Lavin and J. Plummer (eds.), *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honour of Millard Meiss*, New York: New York University Press, 1977, pp. 152–156.

[37]Borsook, *Mural Painters*, pp. 119–120 and figs. 144 and 145. Recent restoration has obscured these marks. See also E. Borsook and J. Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Sta Trinita, Florence*, Doornspijk: Davaco, 1981, especially Appendix II, 'Technique and Condition.'

[38]Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, figs. 227 and 228.

[39]White, *Birth and Rebirth*, p. 189.

Filippo Lippi's *Pitti Tondo*.[40] There is a balance drawn here, he says, between the use of the focal point as meaning as well as part of the design. Kubovy has also recently examined the same phenomenon.[41]

At a later stage, and especially by the time of the High Renaissance in the very late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, while the use of perspectival grids or schemes are less rigid and dominating than in the Quattrocento and the delineation of space more subtle, the use of a central or vanishing point to underline meaning takes on an increased significance. It is often used to emphasize the focal point of the work. The classic examples here are the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, in Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan (detail, fig. 126), and Raphael's *School of Athens* (detail, fig. 114) and *Disputa* (fig. 127) in the Vatican Stanza della Segnatura, adjacent to the Sistine Chapel.[42]

Although Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* has no clear spatial organisation in terms of linear perspective, knowledge of this type of Renaissance fresco construction does suggest the use of a device such as a rotating plumb–line affixed to the picture surface and used as an 'axis' in order to transfer the circular emphasis of Michelangelo's design to a wall about seventeen metres high. The circularity of the design has received much comment, yet it is important to assess the way in which the effect was actually achieved on the wall–surface. As this could hardly have been produced 'free–hand,' it would thus have been necessary to select a specific point on the wall around which to arrange the composition. It seems safe to

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[40]*Ibid.*, pp. 191, 197–198.

[41]M. Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 1–7. He refers to examples by Masaccio, Piero, Veneziano and Perugino.

[42]For Leonardo's *Last Supper*, where the vanishing point is centred on Christ's head, see L. Goldscheider, *Leonardo*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1969, figs. 73 and 74; and Wright, *Perspective*, pp. 94–99. A nail–hole which forms the focal point of both the orthogonals of the room and the circular springing of the arch of the window seems to be visible just above Christ's left ear, in the detail shown. In Raphael's *School of Athens*, a nail hole is visible at the vanishing point between the figures of Plato and Aristotle, just below waist height; in the *Disputa*, the vanishing point of the orthogonals coincides with the Host (see figs. 156 and 164, in Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance*, vol. 2).

assume that Michelangelo, who avowed he 'painted with his brains not his hands,'[43] would not have selected such a point for purely pictorial reasons.

By very careful formal analysis of the fresco's composition, using the manipulation of marked transparencies on a large-scale reproduction, it is possible to locate the precise centre of the circles which underlie the main features of the design (fig. 52) – a location that seems confirmed in the fact that the diagonals also converge at the same point (fig. 53). The yellow sun-aureole which seems to form a halo around the head of the central figure of Christ, re-echoing the gesture of His arms, does not form the centre of the circularity of the composition or the converging diagonals. Nor can the centre be found at Christ's head or heart (suggesting, respectively, intellect or emotion) as might perhaps be expected. The focal point of the formal analysis, both of the circular and diagonal lines of the composition, appears to lie lower down on the drapery[44] in the exact centre of Christ's right thigh. Christ's thigh may thus be regarded as the specific pivotal point for both the circularity of the design and for the diagonal 'rays' extending outward from the central Sun-Christ. From the roundness of the contours of the thigh itself to the inner and outer circles of figures, the composition of the entire fresco is seen to be precisely constructed from this point. No other point generates the same effect and the thigh is quite clearly the point, undivided and stationary, upon which Michelangelo's Heavens depend.

A precise mark or possibly a hole in the centre of the thigh where a constructional device such as a rotating or hinged plumb-line could have been affixed is clearly visible in any detailed photograph (fig. 128). Michelangelo's use of nails and plumb-lines has been noted during the restoration of the ceiling, and this

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[43]Ramsden, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 26; Clements, *Theory of Art*, p. 35, 'Io rispondo che si dipinge col ciervello e non con le mane.' Michelangelo viewed the hand as agent of the intellect: 'Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto/ c'un marmo solo in se non circonscriva/ col suo superchio, e solo a quello arriva/ la man che ubidisce all'intelletto,' ('the best of artists never has a concept/ A single block of marble does not contain/ Inside its husk, but to it may attain/ Only if hand follows intellect'), see Gilbert, no. 149, and Summers, *Language of Art*, p. 206.

[44]Christ's drapery is original and not part of Volterra's later additions, as is demonstrated by Venusti's copy of 1549 (fig. 65).

seems to be the method of construction of circular motifs like the sun and moon in the Creation panels, yet close examination of the mark or nail–hole in the *Last Judgment* to confirm this hypothesis is not possible at this stage.[45] Viewed with binoculars from the scaffolding at the altar end of the Sistine Chapel during a visit in March 1989, the mark on the thigh was quite distinct, but its precise nature could not be identified. The restoration of the *Last Judgment* from early 1990, involving closer inspection and even the use of X–ray methods, may well provide a more definite answer. Apart from the 'lighter' appearance of the fresco that may be expected after cleaning, specific evidence of construction may also be found.[46]

Bearing in mind Michelangelo's own ideas about imbuing artistic design with intellectual or religious meaning, as well as considering the relation between meaning and formal design in Renaissance art in general as discussed, an explanation for this point of focus should be sought. The probable underlying reason for Michelangelo's selection of this specific point on Christ's thigh, as the pivotal centre of the entire cosmological fresco must surely relate to the Biblical reference, in the book of Revelations, chapter 19:16 which, describing the Christ of the Judgment, reads: 'And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.'[47] It does not seem to be mere coincidence that this is followed immediately by a reference to the Sun–symbol: 'And I saw an angel standing in the sun...'(v. 17).[48] The formal interpretation of the

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[45]See, F. Mancinelli, 'Michelangelo at Work,' in Chastel et al., *Sistine Chapel*, pp. 218–259, especially p. 247. Concerning the 'nail–hole' on the end wall, in a personal communication Professor Pietrangeli informs me that 'a definite answer will only be found when, at the beginning of the 1990's, the cleaning will reach that particular part of the fresco.'

[46]See discussion of the use of X–ray machines and computers in the examination of the frescoes, reported by P. Elmer–DeWitt, 'Old Masters, New Tricks,' *Time International*, 134 (25) Dec. 18th, 1989, pp. 50–51. For example, the discovery of arcs or straight lines in the sinopia, corresponding to the suggested 'circles' or 'rays' of the design, could lead to a verification of the central point of construction of the circular composition (as in figs. 52, 53).

[47]The Vulgate reads: 'Et habet in vestimento, et in femore suo scriptum: Rex regem et Dominus dominantiumum;' taken from *Bibliorum Sacrorum; Latinae Versione Antiquae* (ed. D. Petri), Sabatier: Brepols, 1981, vol. 3, p. 1028.

[48]The 'angel' here, is identified with Christ as the 'Mighty Angel' of Revelations (Caird, *Revelation of St John*, pp. 125–126, and above chapter 5, n. 14). The reference to Revelations 19:17 interestingly brings to mind the painting of the same

painting's structure would thus also serve to reinforce Michelangelo's interpretation of the Christ of the *Last Judgment* in His role as supreme ruler of the universe in both temporal and spiritual realms.

iv) The Symbolism of Revelations 19:16

Problems of art historical interpretation will be more full discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis but, for the time being, it is necessary to consider additional evidence which might confirm this reading of the thigh of the Sun–Christ as both the literal and symbolic centre of Michelangelo's design. In order to do this, it will be necessary to return to the type of source material which has already been discussed in the preceding chapters: art historical, theological, philosophical and literary.

Formal analyses of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* which include specific discussion of the geometrical underpinning of the composition are few, but, in one of the rare formal analyses of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Steinberg also observed that the thigh of Christ appeared to act as a focal area. He commented briefly on the thigh as a focal point, recognizing an emphasis on the area in Michelangelo's design.[49] He failed, however, to see that it might have any special symbolism and dismissed any deeper meaning out of hand: 'Whoever,' he says, 'heard of thighs and tibias as conveyors of grace?'[50] – and he pursued this line of investigation no further.

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name (*The Angel Standing in the Sun*, 1846), in the Tate Gallery, by J. M. W. Turner, whose obsession with sun and light effects is well known (M. Butlin and E. Joll, *Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, vol. 2, plate 431). Turner's reputed death–bed pronouncement, 'The Sun is God,' provides the title for a recent work which traces similar themes (J. B. Bullen, ed., *The Sun is God. Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

[49]Steinberg, 'Corner of *Last Judgment*,' p. 240 and plates 7 and 9.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 240. Steinberg quotes Goethe for corroboration ('Did not Goethe declare, "Every ethical expression pertains only to the upper part of the body"?'). Steinberg returns to the examination of the same theme in a recent renewed discussion of his theory of the 'Slung Leg' of the Florentine Pietà (Steinberg, 'The Missing Leg, Twenty Years After,'), but here he describes Goethe's dictum as 'silly' (*ibid.*, p. 495). He insists that widespread objections to his theory concerning Christ's 'Missing Leg' are simply based on 'the scandalous notion that Michelangelo would involve an inferior limb in Christological symbolism' (*ibid.*,). This appears quite false to anyone familiar with the immense significance of Revelations 19:16 of which

This omission appears even more curious when one notes the pronounced emphasis on the thigh in the earlier 'Casa Buonarroti' sketch for the *Last Judgment* (fig. 50), where the figure of Mary is used to focus attention on Christ's thigh since her hand is significantly laid in this position. The mother of Christ is clearly depicted here in Apocalyptic fashion, with reference to the book of Revelations (specifically Revelations 12:1), since the moon lies at her feet. This sketch, therefore, seems to reinforce the positive emphasis on Christ's thigh in the finished work, and the link to Revelations as a source.

The range of symbolism attached to parts of the human body is amply demonstrated by different Medieval and Renaissance texts, many of which connect the human form with astronomical or astrological symbolism (as in fig. 129).[51] Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of man at the focus of both square and circle is well known and here the navel forms the central point.[52] In a consideration of Michelangelo's usage, however, it is necessary to examine the Biblical meaning of the symbol. Several other references in the Scriptures to the thigh are to be found, especially in Genesis, where it is used as a symbol for truth to reinforce the swearing of an oath.[53] Elsewhere, it stands as a symbol for power and strength, especially as the place which customarily bore the sword.[54] This scriptural meaning spilled over into Christian iconography and Shapiro comments on the symbolic significance of the thigh in Early Christian iconography.[55]

Steinberg seems to remain unaware.

[51]For further examples, see Heniger, *Cosmographical Glass*, chapter 5, 'The Human Microcosm,' pp. 144–158; W. Kenton, *Astrology, The Celestial Mirror*, New York: Avon, 1974, plate 27 and figs. 30, 34, 64, 67. For Michelangelo's own comment on the symbolic relationship between the limbs of man and architecture, see Ramsden, *Letters*, no. 358 (dated 1550), vol. 2, p. 129, which derives from Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, book 3.

[52]See Chastel, *Humanism*, fig. 179; also Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, pp. 13, 19, for the circle as symbolic of God and 'rooted in Neoplatonism.' Wittkower further adds, 'the geometry of the circle had an almost magical power over these men.'

[53]Genesis 24:2–3 and 47:29 ('...put thy hand under my thigh. And I will make thee swear by the Lord...'); cf. also Jeremiah 31:19.

[54]For example, Psalms 45:3 ('gird thy sword on thy thigh O most mighty'); Song of Solomon 3:8; Judges 3:16 and 15:8.

[55]Shapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art*, chapter 5, pp. 125–30,

The Biblical usage of the symbol of the thigh forms the foundation for the explanation of the verse Revelations 19:16 in the majority of commentaries on Revelations. Caird points out that it is natural for the title to be centred on Christ's thigh since all would readily understand that the thigh was the place where the sword hung, the weapon with which the Victory and the Title had been won.[56] Lenski emphasizes that, with the location of Christ's title on the thigh, the name was clearly written in a place 'where all could see it without effort,' an idea also stressed by other commentators.[57] Lahaye perceptively points out that, as a warrior goes into battle with his sword on his thigh, so Christ's 'sword' or weapon is his spoken word. Being written in the place where the sword was customarily worn, the inscription 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' demonstrates the power of Christ at the actual moment of Judgment.[58]

As a further reinforcement of the importance of the Biblical text of Revelations 19:16 and the likelihood of Michelangelo's allusion to it in his fresco, it is also important to consider the Liturgy of the Roman Church. A special Mass (Vespers) was said at the 'unveiling' of the *Last Judgment* on All Saints' Eve, October 31st, 1541, and it cannot be coincidence that exactly twenty–nine years earlier in 1512, the completion and 'unveiling' of Michelangelo's frescoes on the Sistine ceiling was also celebrated on the same festival.[59] This seems curious in view of the fact that the primary dedication of the Sistine Chapel was to the Virgin

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comments on the symbolic significance of the thigh in Christian iconography and detects an emphasis on it in several early manuscripts illustrating the Apocalypse (for example, the so–called Trier Apocalypse). The *Last Judgment* was more often based on sources in the Gospels, but references to the Apocalypse were commonly included, for which see M. R. James, *The Apocalypse in Art*, Oxford University Press: London, 1931. See also Dürer's two Apocalypse series which feature similar themes, like the 'woman clothed with the sun' and the Apocalyptic Sun–Christ (Strauss, *Complete Engravings*, fig. 25, 27, 51, 85).

[56]Caird, *Revelation of St John the Divine*, pp. 246–247.

[57]R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St John's Revelation*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963, p. 556; H. Hailey, *Revelation. An Introduction and Commentary*, Michigan: Baker, 1979, p. 386; W. Barclay, *The Revelation of St John*, Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1960, p. 235.

[58]T. Lahaye, *Revelations. Illustrated and Made Plain*, Michigan: Zondervan, 1975, p. 264.

[59]De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 22 and vol. 2, p. 6.

Mary.[60] The festival of All Saints and its Vigil (the previous evening) does seem relevant to the subject of the *Last Judgment*, however, for, in the Mass, readings concerning judgment and the fate of the blessed and damned are taken from Revelations.[61] What appears to be more significant, in relation to Michelangelo's emphasis on the thigh, is the fact that, according to the Catholic Missal, the Kingship of Christ was always a major theme connected with the time of All Saints. The services for late October (particularly the last Sunday) are presently dedicated to the theme of 'The Kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ,'[62] and the precise Biblical reference of Revelations 19:16 is included in a special service at the very end of October.[63] Pope Paul III had, it seems, returned especially from Bologna in order to conduct the service, on the last day of October, at the time of All Saints.[64]

The belief that the unveiling took place on Christmas day that year, expressed by Vasari, probably refers to a significant second ceremony, associated perhaps with the admission at that time of a wider public. The importance of the Christmas festival for the Sun–Christ theme has already been mentioned in chapter

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[60]Ettlinger, *Sistine Chapel*, p. 14.

[61]See Catholic Missal, ed. cit., pp. 1245–1249. The lesson for the Vigil of All Saints is Revelations 5:6–12 ('And I John saw in the midst...' etc.) and for All Saints itself is Revelations 7:2–12 ('I John saw a second Angel Coming...').

[62]This very special festival of the last Sunday of October was decreed in 1925 by Pope Pius XI, but, as he stated in the encyclical giving reasons for the festival and its celebration at the end of October, it was based on an 'already' existing and important tradition of Christ as King at the time of All Saints. This very ancient tradition, he said, associated the concept of Christ as King of Kings with the end of the Liturgical year in October, at the time of 'the glory of Him who triumphs in all the Saints and all the Elect.' Pope Pius cited the same Biblical verse, Revelations 19:16 (see C. Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals, 1903–1939*, pp. 271–279, especially pp. 273 and 277).

[63]Catholic Missal, ed. cit., p. xxxviii and p. 1237; also *Breviarum Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini. Pars Autumnalis*, Turonibus: A. Mame et Filiorum, 1933, p. 786 ('Habet in vestimento et in femore suo...'). So strong is this theme in association with All Saints, that the Biblical reference is even used in Anglican worship at All Saints. The Table of Lessons in the English Prayer Book gives Revelation 19:1–17 as the second lesson for evening prayer for the Festival of All Saints. The importance of the links between the liturgy and iconography, especially in the Sistine Chapel is demonstrated by De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 35–36.

[64]According to the diary book of the Sistine Chapel, 31st October 1541 was a Monday ('die lune ultima octobris') and the Pope had returned from Bologna the day before (De Campos, *Michelangelo*, 38, n. 67). Details are also given here of the fresco's inauguration to a wider audience the following Christmas.

5, and the Coming of Christ at Christmas was traditionally taken as a prefiguration of the *Last Judgment*, and is still expressed as such in the Christmas Mass. At Vespers on Christmas eve, the singing of 'When Heaven's Sun has arisen, ye shall see the King of Kings coming forth,' seems to indicate the exact theme of the fresco itself.[65] Ettlinger, in his discussion of the earlier frescoes in the Chapel, comments on the idea that a major iconographic theme of the chapel is one of Christ as King and Priest, and this may further explain the choice of the celebration of All Saints for the inauguration of the frescoes, both on ceiling and altar wall.[66]

Amongst the different literary and philosophical sources which have been examined here as influential on Michelangelo's work on the fresco, further references to the theme of Kingship and even the symbolism of the thigh are to be found. Ficino drew attention to the concept of Christ as King of Kings, as well as the classical, mythological idea of symbolic birth from the thigh.[67] And in the Hermetic writings which have been discussed, the use of the talisman of Apollo as 'King of Kings' seems to reinforce the prevalence of the theme and Michelangelo's likely awareness of it.[68]

Amongst the literary sources discussed, Dante's *Divina Commedia* provides very strong motivation for Michelangelo's centering the fresco physically and symbolically upon the location of Christ's thigh for, at the end of *Inferno*, references to thigh symbolism are made in a specifically cosmological context. It will be remembered, as has been argued above,[69] that in Dante's spherical, geocentric view, where he was faced with the problem of finding an exact centre for the spheres of

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[65]Already cited in chapter 5 above; see Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, p. 154. For this theme, see also J. Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, especially chapter 4, 'King of Kings' (pp. 46–56) and chapter 5, 'The Cosmic Christ,' (pp. 57–70).

[66]Ettlinger, *Sistine Chapel*, pp. 76–93, especially p. 86f.

[67]For example, Ficino, *De Amore*, pp. 49–51; *idem.*, *Philebus Commentary*, p. 244 (where he quotes Plato, *Laws*); and *idem*, *De Vita*, p. 1 (on the idea of birth from Jove's thigh).

[68]Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 71.

[69]Chapter 6, section v. The idea has also been developed in a separate paper ('The Centre of the Universe in Dante's Cosmology,' – submitted).

the universe, Dante selected Lucifer's thigh as the centre of the terrestrial part of the geocentric system. In terms of the antithesis between the earthly and celestial areas, Dante's choice of Lucifer's thigh was almost certainly chosen as the antitype in meaning of Christ's thigh as described in Revelations.[70] It therefore seems entirely possible for Michelangelo, who was so imbued with the ideas of Dante, to have logically transferred the idea of the central point of the universe from Lucifer (specifically Lucifer's thigh in the geocentic system) not only to the Deity in the form of the Sun, but even more precisely to the symbolic thigh of Christ Himself. Dante's images of Lucifer's thigh as the centre of the terrestrial system and the 'Point' of light of the Sun–Christ as the centre of the celestial system were thus able to be combined in one system. Precipitated, it seems, by the knowledge of Copernicus' idea of the Sun–centred universe (made known by 1533) and set against the background factors which have been outlined, Michelangelo's fresco offered a more logical solution than Dante's system, because the centre of both celestial and terrestrial regions were fused in a single point.

Michelangelo's knowledge of and interest in Dante appears to support the reading of Christ's thigh as symbolic centre of the circular universe, but the Biblical text in itself seems to provide a fitting answer to the choice of central point for the overall circular arrangement of the fresco around the Sun–Christ. The Christ of the *Last Judgment* is depicted as the cosmic ruler of universe, and the idea that Michelangelo centred his great fresco on the important text of Revelations 19:16 totally confirms this view. Christ is here depicted theologically, Neoplatonically and scientifically, as Michelangelo viewed Him – as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Sun, the centre of the Universe.

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[70]Dante, *Inferno* XXXIIII, 76–77.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

> Therefore alongside the ancient hypotheses, which are no more probable, let us permit these new hypotheses also to become known, especially since they are admirable as well as simple and bring with them a huge treasure of very skillful observations. So far as hypotheses are concerned, let no-one expect anything certain from astronomy, which cannot furnish it, lest he accept as the truth ideas conceived for another purpose, and depart from this study a greater fool than when he entered it. Farewell.
>
> Osiander, Preface to *De Revolutionibus.*[1]

i) Art Historical Interpretation

It is possible that, in the course of the current restorations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco, firm evidence may come to light to support the theory that the composition of the fresco is formally centred on the point on Christ's thigh. The discovery of traces of a nail hole at the centre, or the existence of underlying 'arcs of circles' on the intonaco or on the sinopia would confirm the hypothesis. It also seems quite probable that cleaning and restoration of the *Last Judgment* fresco might result in clearer, brighter colours and a greater emphasis on light and the sun than on the 'dark desperate atmosphere' which is often mentioned. This would result in the appearance of the fresco once more in the terms perceived by early copyists such as Rota, who evidently viewed it in terms of light and Sun-symbol, to judge by his engraving of 1569 (fig. 66). It is not possible conclusively to prove the Biblical source and constructional basis of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as outlined in chapter 9, nor does the main hypothesis of this thesis rest upon this deduction.

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[1]Concluding lines of Osiander's preface to Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus*, which was issued in the printed editions, see Nicholas Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, ed. cit. p. xvi. The question of 'certainty' in art historical hypotheses as well, including the present one, would appear to share certain common features.

However, the apparent use of a formal constructional device underlying the composition of the fresco, and centred upon a point based on a relevant scriptural source does seem to confirm the issue of circularity and to tie all the previous cosmological arguments together. Firm evidence of the use of Christ's thigh as the pivot of the composition would tend to confirm the present interpretation of the fresco, but the broader interpretation, which links together the concept of the Apollonian Sun–Christ, the metaphysical idea of God as the centre of the circular system of the universe, and the specifically Copernican analogy, does not rest solely on this final point: each stage of the argument is related but at the same time independently viable. Although it is difficult conclusively to *prove* this broader hypothesis, the weight of evidence built up amongst the theological, philosophical and literary works, which have all been proposed here as source material for Michelangelo, does tend to confirm it.

The sources examined have (with the exception of Copernicus' writings) all been suggested in the literature as influential upon different works by Michelangelo and they are, according to this hypothesis, finally brought together in this most important late work. The discussion has not been based on obscure or arbitrary sources, used to force meaning or superimpose an interpretation; the accepted sources have simply been examined in a different way, as a result of the realisation that De Tolnay's dismissal of *direct* Copernican influence, which had been uncritically transmitted for so long, was unreasonable. The linking of the accepted sources with the specifically documented interest in Copernicus, which took place at exactly the right moment just prior to the commission, leads to the full interpretation developed here. The key piece of evidence of the 1533 lecture on Copernican ideas given in the Vatican before Clement VII may be used as a final historical fact to reinforce an already strongly developed argument based on the correspondence between visual elements and theological, literary and philosophical factors. Even if these areas have been examined in separate chapters here, for the purposes of discussion, the highly interwoven and interdisciplinary aspects of man's view of the sun during the Renaissance will have become clear. The possibility of a