

Caravaggio and Baglione: The Collision of Humanism and Religion

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Abstract: The Renaissance has always played an important part in the history of art, and during this period many new doctrines and ideas were born in Europe. Caravaggio and Baglione, as artists belonging to the same Renaissance period, expressed very different symbolic meanings in their creations. This paper will explore the conflict between humanism and religion during the Renaissance in the context of the times by presenting the different ideas expressed by these two artists in their opposing paintings: the *Amor Vincit Omnia* and the *Sacred Love Profane Love* and then demonstrate how this idea was reflected in society through Caravaggio's *St Matthew and the angels*, and shows the specificity of humanism and religious culture in the times and confirms the importance of change in the development of society.

1 INTRODUCTION

"In modern terms, humanism is a value of life. It stands for the idea that values are embodied around the centre of the human being, that history and humanity are created by human beings, and that this idea says that various religious cultures are formed not because of some superhuman entity, such as God, a moral code, but by human beings who determine its meaning and value." (Tzvetan, 2002) "Behind every historical conflict is not just a superficial quarrel, but the product of the collision of elements of thought, feeling and behaviors in an era born of various factors. If religiosity was the burden of the Reformation, freethought is the burden of the Renaissance, of contemporary society. "(Trinkaus, 1976) Viewed with an objective eye, every period has its counterpart in humanistic thought corresponding to the age, and they are the product of the society of the time and the influence of the various results obtained.

"For a long time down the line, people were under the asceticism brought on by religious fanaticism. They refused to see the beauty of nature and instead saw it as something evil. "(Rose, 1898) Prior to the Renaissance, religiosity dominated the ruling class of power, promoting a range of ideas centered on Christian theology and emphasizing the importance of faith and the afterlife. Renaissance humanism, on the other hand, promoted reason and secularism, with its emphasis on the importance of rational thought and reality, as opposed to the religiousism that

continued in the Middle Ages, which emphasized the value of the present world by focusing on secular life and humanistic thought. Its ideas have caused far-reaching influence and reform in later generations. Here's what Trevor had to say about it, "Like a succession of rainstorms ending in a magnificent thunderstorm, it purified the European ethos and changed the temperature of Europe, beginning at the end of the fifteenth century and sustaining it until the Renaissance period of the mid-seventeenth century represented that change, after which came change and enlightenment." (Trevor-Roper, 1959). The 17th century was at the end of the Renaissance movement. The Renaissance was one of the most influential intellectual movements in the history of art, and indeed in Western history, a cultural movement resulting from class confrontation, in which the birth of humanism and the conflict between this new ideology and religion had a huge impact on the development of art and indeed of the humanities.

During this period, Caravaggio created *Amor Vincit Omnia* in 1601 and 1602, and then in 1602, the artist Giovanni Baglione opposed the ideas expressed by Caravaggio with his work *Sacred Love Profane Love*. That same year, 1602, Caravaggio was hired to create *St Matthew and the Angels*, a work against which the society of the time also maintained a different voice.

This study begins with the conflict between the two artists, borrowing a work by the artist Caravaggio and a work by the artist Baglione, exploring the collision between religious culture and humanism

during the Renaissance in terms of the conflict between the elements and the symbolism, and then borrowing Caravaggio's St. Matthew and the Angel to embody how these conflicts were embodied at the time in the social level, and at the same time, applying the literature as well as the relevant Using literature and the analysis and reading of relevant knowledge, the change in the symbolic meaning of the picture shows the change in thinking that occurred under the influence of different cultures and purposes in society.

2 AMOR VINCIT OMNIA AND SACRED LOVE PROFANE LOVE



Figure 1: Amor Vincit Omnia, Caravaggio, 1602, oil on canvas. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amor_Vincit_Omnia_\(Caravaggio\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amor_Vincit_Omnia_(Caravaggio))

As shown in Figure 1, Amor Vincit Omnia is an oil painting by Caravaggio completed in 1602. The image shows a naked boy with black wings against a dark background, smiling and holding several arrows, which occupy the central of the image. The young man bends one knee and rests on a pile of miscellaneous objects, which are stacked in a triangular slope, from top to bottom you can see the crown, white cloth, olive branches, armor that looks like it is broken, musical instruments, sheet music and other items.

Following Amor Vincit Omnia, Sacred Love Profane Love in figure 2 is an oil painting by Giovanni-Baglione from 1603, which is divided into two parts, the upper part of which shows an angel in magnificent armour, holding a bow and arrows, and dividing the lower part of the picture between the two characters in a graceful gesture. The two characters at the bottom of the picture are a demon with a close-up of his face, turning his head, and an angel, who, unlike the other, is paralysed on the ground, with his right hand raised and a look of panic on his face.



Figure 2: Sacred Love Profane Love, Giovanni-Baglione, 1603, oil on canvas. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/59391288808615020/>.

2.1 Definition of the Elements of Religious Art

Before discussing these two works, what needs to be understood is the definition of religious art. Howes Graham, in his study of icons, states that 'the image is not only a medium for worship purposes, but also an essential element. For the icon painter, the process of creation is not a demonstration of one's claims, but rather an act by which one establishes a sphere in which power can operate...The image of the icon shares in the sanctity and glory of its archetype, and as such is worthy of acceptance and veneration, and its adoration is transferred to the subject idea of God behind the symbol.' (Howes Graham, 1984).

From this, we can conclude that religious art is full of religious nature, the core of propaganda is to convey the teachings and beliefs, and most of the religious stories, myths and legends and images of the gods as the content of the creation, in order to achieve the purpose of religion is sacred and cannot be offended by the idea of propaganda. Secondly, religious art is usually full of symbolism, and the creators will use specific symbols or signs to convey religious meanings. In other words, the images that appear in religious art usually have a fixed meaning, more important than the image and the artist who created it, is the symbol of the idea behind the image.

It is important to note that although they both use cupid as a medium for conveying ideas, Caravaggio and Baglione's two works are not religious art, and they choose to use mythological figures to create a contrast and conflict that is more of a contest of positions than a propaganda of religious doctrines. This break with tradition is more indicative of the intensity and conflict of the Renaissance intellectual revolution.

2.2 Behind the Techniques and Elements Used

In Caravaggio's *Amor Vincit Omnia*, Caravaggio uses chiaroscuro, a realist representation that seeks a sense of realism and objectivity in the image and usually avoids the interference of subjective interpretation. This method of expression focuses on the true reflection of real life and nature.

Baglione counters not only by using the same painting technique as Caravaggio's, but he also draws the face of the Devil in the picture as Caravaggio's face, satirising Caravaggio through the Devil's evil, unrighteousness and holiness, and also using the layout of the picture to show this: in Baglione's picture, the angel stands triumphantly in front of Caravaggio's cupid and prevents cupid from communicating with the Devil (Caravaggio) from communicating. After analysing the elements, it can be concluded that: angels and demons, sacred and secular, the elements in these two works of art are in opposition to each other, and through the point of view of which side's love is fuller of power, it shows the confrontation that was created by the opposing ideas of the Renaissance, between secularism and religiosity.

However. The fall of the reign of religiosity is inevitable, as analysed from the point of view of behaviors and as evidenced by later society: 'The work, as the output of the artist, represents a generated connection between the individual artist and reality, and what is in it cannot be a pure experience of reality...A work is real when it embodies a personal significance and an understanding of what this particular person understands to be the truth, it is real.' (Dixon & John, 1993). Society is made up of human beings, and how it is perceived, embodied and expressed is the result of the influence of objective reality and subjective will. This also proves that it was impossible for the ruling class in the Middle European period to try to use the concept of religion to suppress the reality and the rise of humanistic thought.

From this it can be concluded that behind the elements and techniques being employed is actually the struggle between human. "Human beings are not subject to anything other than their own kind, not even to God, and the norms or measure of existence must come out of the will of the person who has it. The Renaissance, contrary to much classicism, believed that the right direction for human life was the creative use of practicality in shaping one's being, rather than defining ascent or unity in terms of the "sacred" represented by religious cultures..."

(William Schweiker, 2009). Baglione's choice of opposing elements and the same painting technique to counter Caravaggio can be described as a clash between the two doctrines on a macro level, however the choice of method and the act of expressing dissent is of his own choosing. Although he represents religious opposition to secularism, his own choice of behavior is contrary to religious dogma, and his confrontation with Caravaggio is only driven by the personal will of the religious religion he believes he represents. To use the point mentioned by William Schweiker, Baglione's behavior is a paradoxical phenomenon. "It is only when society becomes secular that the hidden problems behind the concept of the sacred become apparent." (Dupré, Louis. 1975). These subtle differences may represent the results that will be seen in later reforms, and this may be sideways evidence that the ruling class of religion will become a thing of the past in the reforms of history and the changing minds of mankind.

3 ST MATTHEW AND THE ANGEL: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEFORE AND AFTER THE REVISION



Figure 3: St Matthew and the Angel ver1 and ver2, Caravaggio, oil on canvas. https://x.com/solas_na_greine/status/1781393092051943529?mx=2.

The image3 shows the first version of the image of St Matthew and the Angel. In it, St. Matthew is depicted by Caravaggio as a bald, barefoot, poor, aged labourer, frowning, with his clothes dishevelled, and a wide book clutched tightly in his hand as he records something. Beside him is an angel, intimately situated at St Matthew's side in the position of one arm resting on his palm.

"Caravaggio's religious paintings were not always approved by the Church, as in the case of the first

version of the altarpiece of St Matthew and the Angel, which was destroyed in Berlin in 1945, and he was forced to paint an entirely new version." (Gash John, 2015). The example is a good demonstration of how the conflict between humanism and religiosity is manifested in society as well as among the people. The picture on the right is the final version of St Matthew with the angel. The figures and postures of St Matthew and the angel have been drastically altered, with St Matthew, in his glorious clerical robes, looking up at the angel to the right, and the angel being laid out in a distanced orientation, looking down on St Matthew at a top-to-bottom angle. These modifications behind the physique and layout are very strongly symbolic. The alterations to the painting, where the original angel is in physical contact with St Matthew and the two figures are positioned very close to each other, reflect equality and intimacy, symbolising religious theology and mankind being brought closer together. However, Caravaggio's interpretation was not recognized, and was considered anathema at the time - the reason for this was that, combined with the thinking of the time, most people still retained a religiously orientated mindset that Christian theology should be sacred and superior to mankind, and that for the angel, symbolizing God's messenger, to be close to a human being was a kind of blasphemy against a sacred symbol. They believed that God's love should be divine and that being His believer should be devout devotion. Thus, in the socially acceptable version of St Matthew and the angel, the angel and St Matthew no longer have physical contact but are modified to appear as coming down from heaven to embody the Gospel of God's coming to earth.

"In terms of tradition in art history, Caravaggio may not be as great as Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo, but I think Caravaggio is a more important presence than any artist. He is not the greatest artist of the Baroque period, but his art has become a perception, a logic and tradition of behaviour and has influenced us implicitly." (Arenas, 2016). Under the influence of the religionist ideology of the time, which considered the divine right to be immaculate and superior to human rights, the first draft of St Matthew and the Angels, with its human light of equality and gentleness, was undoubtedly a major shock, and, as Amelia says, Caravaggio's unique interpretation of religious themes triggered the thoughts of people from different social classes, appreciating or rejecting it, and it was a proof of the shock he caused to society of the time. As Amelia says, Caravaggio's unique interpretation of religious themes provoked the thoughts of people from

different social classes. Caravaggio's work forced society to rethink the relationship between religion and human nature, and had a profound impact on the intellectual progress of art history.

4 CONCLUSION

It is because of the conflicts that existed in the history that the modern man can enjoy the equality of human rights and freedom of thought, which are more open than in the Middle Ages. Even if the conflict between religion and humanism is only a part of the long history that has helped mankind to evolve, the spirit of rebellion of those who dared to fight against the traditions of their time, as Caravaggio did, is undoubtedly great, because the reforms of the pioneers have laid the foundations for the generations that came after them. As Amelia Arenas said, Caravaggio has become a legacy of ideas, and the same can be said for art - it is the ideas and needs that emerge as times change and people's needs change that slowly liberate the artist's mind from its framework.

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