“TO DO JUSTLY, AND TO LOVE MERCY”

ARBITRATING DIVINE LAW IN EARLY MODERN ART

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The legal process is a far-reaching endeavor, with reverberations in many facets of society. It should come as no surprise, then, that law also impacts the visual arts. I study Christian devotional art in the medieval and early modern eras, and the paintings and sculptures produced in those periods frequently ruminate on ideal forms of jurisprudence and the administration of clemency and justice. Always hovering over earthly systems of justice is the Last Day, when souls will be consigned to heaven or hell by the great Judge, assisted by the advocacy of the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, and other important saints who serve as “lawyers” for mankind in that final, celestial courtroom.
To begin, let us think broadly about the ways in which art and law intersect. Art is frequently used to represent certain legal principles, sometimes to such a degree that they become iconic. For instance, when we see a woman with a blindfold holding a sword and a pair of scales, we immediately know that she is an allegory of justice. But art gives voice to quite different aspects of legal practice as well. Iconoclasm—or the “destruction of images”—is often connected to politics and law. In ancient Rome, when an emperor fell from favor and was condemned for crimes against the state, the senate would sometimes pass a damnatio memoriae, or “damnation of memory,” against him. One of the most significant ways the emperor’s memory was “damned” was by destroying his public portraits. Sometimes his images would be completely obliterated, but at other times a statue or painting might be only partially disfigured. For instance, the nose might be knocked off so that the emperor’s likeness would remain recognizable but now with punitive “scars” for all to see.

Art also reinforces the authority of the law. In a courthouse you might find portraits of local or national rulers—sometimes positioned directly above the bench—in order to indicate the judge’s source of authority. In early modern Europe, when someone was condemned to death by hanging, a friar would sometimes hold an image of the crucified Christ on a pole near the face of the condemned so that the last thing the dying man or woman looked upon would be the dying Savior. In this way, the likeness of their ultimate Judge would be imprinted on their minds and perhaps even aid their penitential process, inspiring a last chance at mercy.

ART AND LEGAL DISPUTE

Among the most dramatic intersections of art and law are the notorious legal battles surrounding high-profile works with disputed ownership or histories of theft. Gustav Klimt’s Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I is a lavishly gilded painting completed in 1907 during the peak of the Austrian art nouveau style (Jugendstil). Recently made famous by the film Woman in Gold, the portrait depicts the Jewish Viennese heiress Adele Bloch-Bauer.

Bloch-Bauer had a large art collection, which she left to her husband when she died in 1925. In 1938, on the verge of World War II, Austria was annexed to Germany, and Bloch-Bauer’s husband—also a Jew—fled to Switzerland, where he later died in 1945. Rather than being passed to surviving family, the couple’s paintings fell into the hands of the Nazis, who amassed priceless collections of confiscated art. Hitler was himself an amateur artist and as a young man even aspired to become a painter. Much of the art stolen by the Third Reich came from Jewish victims of the regime. Some paintings and sculptures were returned to their owners after the war, but many are still lost, unclaimed, or under dispute.

When the Nazis fell from power, the Austrian state claimed some of the stolen art, including the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I, which ended up as a signature piece in the Klimt collection of the Austrian Gallery. But then in 1998, Adele Bloch-Bauer’s niece, Maria Altmann, asserted her rights to her aunt and uncle’s art collection. The Austrian Gallery responded that the portrait was the property of the state and that it would not be returned to the family. A legal battle ensued, and eventually Altmann won the dispute. Today the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I hangs in New York City in the Neue Galerie. This case is just one instance of the intrigue and crime that accrue to some of the world’s most coveted works of art.
Depictions of Judgment Day take pride of place on the spectrum of legal images. A particularly iconic example from the early Renaissance in Burgundy is the Beaune Altarpiece *Last Judgment*, painted by Rogier van der Weyden in the mid-15th century. It was once the centerpiece of the chapel in the Hôtel-Dieu, a richly endowed hospital for the poor in Beaune, France. Renaissance hospitals functioned primarily as hospices, making the sick comfortable in their last weeks of life. Care for the soul and spiritual preparation for death were the primary objectives for the hospital staff, and at the Hôtel-Dieu, the beds were arranged so that the dying could contemplate Rogier’s *Last Judgment*.

In the altarpiece, Christ sits on a rainbow directly above St. Michael the Archangel, who assists the Lord by weighing souls on a large pair of scales. The screaming soul tilting the right-hand balance down is labeled “Peccata” (sins), while the soul on the left is light and unburdened and labeled “Virtutes” (virtues). St. Michael fixes the viewers—dying patients in the hospital—with his razor gaze, asking them to consider their own end. Would their souls be light with virtue or heavy with sin when they stood at God’s judgment bar?

Meanwhile, Christ appears as a perfectly impartial judge—perfect justice balanced with perfect mercy. Although his face is impassive, he displays the wounds in his hands, feet, and side as wellsprings of compassion and badges of redemption. His scarlet cloak seems dyed in his own blood, the blood of “the Lamb that was slain.”

On the Lord’s right is a lily of mercy with white letters that run upward toward his face, reading, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” On Christ’s left, the sword of justice is accompanied by dark red letters, which tumble downward like the cascading folds of his cloak, mimicking the fall of the damned down to hell. These words read, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Meanwhile, the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist—mankind’s two most powerful intercessors before the throne of the great Mediator himself—fall to their knees in advocacy for the souls below, who beseech them for their prayers as they rise from the ground in the Resurrection.

Rogier’s clear and orderly view of Judgment Day, with its cast of assistant judges and saintly “attorneys,” is in keeping with centuries-old iconographic conventions.
far from the Hôtel-Dieu, the French town of Autun is home to a renowned Last Judgment relief carved over the portal of the 12th-century church of Saint-Lazare. One of the most noticeable differences between Saint-Lazare’s organized vision of divine justice and Rogier’s is the treatment of hell. In the former, monstrous, claw-like hands descend to strangle the damned while other souls with distended jaws scream. In Rogier’s composition, by contrast, the damned are not being forced to their doom by demons or pitchforks. Rather they run into hell of their own volition, chased from God’s presence by the indictment of their consciences. Rogier’s Renaissance depiction of hell is arresting psychologically.

Last Judgment portrayals are among the few medieval and early Renaissance scenes that nearly always include nude figures. The souls raised from the dead in Rogier’s painting and brought before the bar of God are naked, echoing Job’s words, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.” The nudity also points to God’s omniscience at Judgment Day—he knows everything about each soul and nothing can be hidden from him. But just as God clothed Adam and Eve after they shamefully acknowledged their nudity, angels sometimes provide clothes for the saved in representations of the Last Judgment. Those who are found unworthy of God’s presence are left to burn in their nakedness forever. The spare number of souls entering into heaven on the left of Rogier’s altarpiece attests to the common Renaissance belief that the majority of humanity would not make it to the celestial city.

AN AMBIGUOUS DOOMSDAY

Another Last Judgment scene, albeit from much later in the Renaissance, is Michelangelo Buonarroti’s great altarpiece fresco for the Sistine Chapel in Rome. It had been more than 20 years since he had completed his work on the Sistine ceiling, and by the time he returned to paint the Last Judgment, his style had changed. Michelangelo is generally grouped in the Italian High Renaissance, an art historical period characterized by idealized figures, balance, symmetry, harmonious colors, and often a stable, triangular organizing principle.

In his later life, however, Michelangelo increasingly exhibited conventions known as Mannerism. Mannerist art exaggerates High Renaissance idealism to the point of artificiality. It exaggerates, distorts, uses strange colors, alters anatomical proportions, and twists figures into cramped, uncomfortable, and sometimes impossible positions. These conventions create an idiosyncratic beauty, often embedded with erudite references. In fact, Mannerist art has much in common with poetry, in which the natural cadence and lexicon of language is “forced” into an artificial meter or rhyming sequence for aesthetic and expressive purposes.

In contrast to Rogier’s predictable, orderly view of the heavenly court, chaos seems to reign in the Sistine fresco. There is no clearly defined triangular compositional structure. Instead, angels, saints, and sinners alike swirl in a blue vortex. Christ and his attendants have all of heaven in which to move, and yet somehow it feels as if there is not enough space. The ring of apostles surrounding the Lord, for instance, is hopelessly cramped. Additionally, the proportions of the figures are inaccurate. The oddly beardless Christ is titanic in size, as if emulating Roman statues of the god Apollo, while the Virgin Mary is much too little and appears to cower beside him. Illogically, the figures at the bottom of the fresco and closest to the viewer are the smallest, with the scale increasing higher up in the sky.

It has been suggested that the exaggerated, “unsettled” quality of Mannerist art may be connected to a general anxiety that characterized the early 16th century. The Protestant
Reformation destabilized the sociopolitical landscape of Western Europe, and in 1527 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V invaded and sacked Rome. Whether or not these events directly affected Michelangelo’s art, anxiety certainly pervades his fresco. Even the saints surrounding Christ and assisting him in the judgment look doubtful about the state of their souls. Many of them hold the instruments of their martyrdoms or other identifiable attributes: St. Andrew with a cross, St. Peter with “the keys of the kingdom,” and St. Lawrence with the grill on which he was allegedly roasted to death. St. Bartholomew, said to be flayed alive, appears to the right and just below the Lord, holding a knife and his own skin, as if it were an old coat. The flayed face—distorted and askew in the folds of loose skin—is a self-portrait of Michelangelo.

Traditionally, saved souls appear on Jesus’s right, welcomed into paradise by his hand lifted in blessing, while the damned are cast off on his left. Michelangelo’s Christ, however, makes curiously ambiguous gestures. His right hand is raised in a powerful but forbidding manner, while his left hand is much gentler. Although the left-hand gesture could be interpreted as softly pushing souls aside, the fingers come surprisingly close to making the ancient sign of benediction. In light of the violent struggles over salvation and heresy in the wake of the Reformation, the uncertainty embedded in Michelangelo’s conception of doomsday rattles viewers’ confidence in their standing within God’s legal system.

Shrinking beneath her son’s heavy hand, the Virgin Mary seems at a loss, incapable of getting an intercessory word in edgewise. On Christ’s left, horrific monsters pull souls down
to the inferno. According to Giorgio Vasari’s 16th-century biography of Michelangelo, the man in the lower right corner surrounded by devils and wrapped in serpents is a portrait of the papal master of ceremonies, who complained to the pope that Michelangelo had included too much nudity in the fresco. Michelangelo supposedly painted him into hell in retribution for his criticism. The Sistine Last Judgment uses both the traditional convention of torturing demons to haul the damned away to hellfire and Rogier’s more psychological punishment, with the weight of conscience and eternal guilt crushing them down to the fiery pit.

The positioning of the Last Judgment within the Sistine Chapel has stirring implications. For hundreds of years, this sacred space has been reserved for solemn liturgies and conclaves to elect new popes. While celebrating mass at the chapel altar, the pope, cardinals, and assistants would face Michelangelo’s fresco. Their vision would most readily be filled not with the blessed in paradise but rather with frightening images, including the green, demonic figure of Charon, who in Greco-Roman mythology rows souls across the River Styx into the underworld. The monstrous demigod is here beating his luckless passengers with an oar. Looming over the celebrant at the altar, Charon communicates to the papal court the distressingly ambiguous message of the entire painting: No one is safe. All are in danger of being smitten by Charon’s oar and the condemning hand of the divine Judge.

Renaissance notions of justice, punishment, and jurisprudence were also expounded in more secular works of art. In the duchy of Burgundy, where Rogier lived and worked, town halls were important centers for legal debates, municipal legislation, and rulings. The city of Bruges in modern-day Belgium is known today for its chocolate shops, waffles, and dark canals with swans. In the 15th century, however, Bruges and its town hall were the epicenter of the Burgundian court. The city magistrates commissioned Gerard David, one of Bruges’s most preeminent artists, to paint a narrative of “righteous judgment” in order to remind them of their scriptural mandate “to do justly, and to love mercy.”

David’s Judgment of Cambyses depicts a Persian emperor and a corrupt judge on two panels. The paintings make use of “continuous narrative,” meaning that different moments in the story play out in the same space. In the background of the left panel, a judge named Sisamnes is accepting a clandestine bribe in exchange for legal indemnity. In the foreground, allegations of corruption have reached the ears of Emperor Cambyses, and he confronts Sisamnes at his judgment seat. Significantly, the architectural setting depicted by David includes reference to a contemporary municipal space in Bruges known as the Poortersloge. Moreover, Cambyses’s retinue of officials are likely portraits of Bruges’s own justice officers. Those men would have carefully pondered the moral of the painting in precisely the way that the Persian magistrates closely observe their emperor’s model of disciplinary action.

Cambyses uses his fingers to enumerate the charges leveled against Sisamnes as a thuggish figure takes the condemned judge by the arm to lead him away. Sisamnes’s face betrays his fear of the law, and the classical roundels mounted on the wall behind his throne reference mythological stories, including Apollo’s ruthless retribution against the foolish and presumptuous satyr Marsyas—a grim portent of things to come.

The grisly punishment of Sisamnes occupies the foreground of the right panel. Like the mythological Marsyas, he has been condemned to be flayed alive. Cambyses looks on solemnly, like an impassive representative of the divine Judge in the heavens. One of the most disturbing details in the composition concerns the executioner on the right, near Sisamnes’s foot. Needing both of his hands to grip the judge’s skin, he has temporarily stowed his blood-stained knife between his teeth. Equally gruesome is the story’s epilogue in the background of the right panel, where Sisamnes’s young son has replaced his father on the judgment seat. Lest the son ever be tempted to take bribes himself, the back of his throne has been hung with his father’s skin as a visceral reminder.
Although chilling in its severity, the paintings’ message expresses Bruges’s unflinching allegiance to “do justly.” There is less evidence, at least in this particular case study, of the city’s commitment to “love mercy”!

**CONFESSION AND RECOMPENSE**

At the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, the Italian Baroque artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio painted a triad of canvases for a small chapel in the Roman church of San Luigi dei Francesi. The chapel had been founded by Matthieu Cointerel, a wealthy French cardinal better known by the Italian version of his name: Matteo Contarelli. Contarelli died in 1585, and his heirs commissioned Caravaggio to complete the plans for the altar of Contarelli’s church.

Caravaggio’s commission came in the wake of a posthumous indictment against Cardinal Contarelli for abusing his high position as papal datary by funneling large sums of Church money into his own pocket. Contarelli’s heirs, embarrassed by the crime, likely instructed Caravaggio to make the paintings into a kind of public penance for the late cardinal. By depicting Matteo Contarelli’s name saint—St. Matthew—Caravaggio uses the story of the evangelist’s conversion as a model for the cardinal’s restitution.22

Among these three paintings, *The Calling of St. Matthew* foregrounds the themes of confession and conversion with particular force. The scriptures identify St. Matthew as a tax collector, whom Jesus found “at the receipt of custom” and to whom he said, “Follow me.”23 That call is the dramatic high point of the composition, even though Christ is at first difficult to recognize. Looking like an ordinary Italian man with a halo barely visible, he gestures to St. Matthew from the shadows on the right edge of the canvas.

Caravaggio painted during the aftermath of the great Tridentine Reform of the Church. Also known as the Counter Reformation, this movement reasserted Roman Catholic doctrine in the face of Protestant heresies, sought to cleanse the Church of abuses, and actively promoted didactic, inspiring, and devotional works of art. In this vein, Caravaggio’s revolutionary compositions are extremely relatable and involve the viewer in a deeply faith-promoting way. In fact, Caravaggio leaves a place for the viewer at the table where St. Matthew and his fellow publicans sift through their money. A worshiper in Contarelli’s chapel could imaginatively scoot up a chair, enter the biblical narrative, and join the evangelist in considering the Lord’s timeless invitation to choose him over the cares of the world.

The dramatic beam of light coming from the right follows the angle of Christ’s pointing finger and shines down on St. Matthew’s face.24 The other two tax collectors at the far end of the table are completely oblivious to this climactic event. One of them even wears corrective lenses to underscore his sharp vision, and yet he is spiritually blind, totally unaware that God
herself stands in the room and beckons. The second publican bends forward and peers intently at the money. St. Matthew finds himself caught between two poles—the pointed gesture of Christ on the one hand and his lucrative trade on the other. In a moment he will make his choice, as will the pious viewer imaginatively sitting at the table with him, for in the words of St. Matthew’s own gospel, “[y]e cannot serve God and mammon.”

Significantly, the evangelist parrots the Lord’s gesture, pointing to himself as if seeking affirmation that he has interpreted the call correctly. His pointing finger, however, specifically gestures to his own heart, anticipating another passage from his gospel that comments on spiritual versus physical wealth: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Christ’s gesturing hand is an artistic “quotation” directly lifted by Caravaggio from Michelangelo’s famous Creation of Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. In that fresco, God the Father extends his arm, having just ignited Adam with “the breath of life.” Adam holds his left hand in the gesture emulated by Caravaggio, pointing to God as the divine origin of his newly “living soul.” St. Paul famously identified a theological link between Christ and Adam upon which Caravaggio’s “quotation” depends. Christ becomes the “new Adam” who redeems the parent of the human race and all his descendants: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

In medieval and early modern theology, after God had created Adam and Eve “in his own image,” they “disfigured” their divine resemblance to him with sin. In order for the exiled descendants of Adam and Eve to regain paradise, God created another man in his own image: Christ, who St. Paul describes as “the image of God,” “the image of the invisible God,” and “the express image of his person.” It is Christ’s perfect and untainted likeness to God that empowers him to save a fallen world and invite even the most disfigured children of Adam and Eve to come and follow him. The gesture of Caravaggio’s distressingly ordinary, even grimy-looking Jesus identifies him as the “new Adam,” calling St. Matthew to be recreated.
“Follow me,” he seems to say, “and I will make you a fisher of men, I will make you an apostle, I will make you an evangelist, I will make you a martyr for my name.”

Recall that post-Reformation Europe was riven with turmoil, with Protestants and Catholics killing one another. This was also an era of zealous evangelization efforts when priests risked their lives to minister to underground Catholics in hostile nations and the great Jesuit missions took Christianity to far-flung corners of the globe. Caravaggio’s painting, with its swooping diagonal lines, viewer-involving composition, and theatrical contrast of inky black with brilliant highlights, was intended to confront viewers with the zeal of Tridentine Europe. Visitors to Contarelli’s chapel should ask themselves, “Is Christ calling me? Have I given him my heart? Am I in danger of choosing mammon, heresy, or vices instead of him?”

The converting call of the painting is also the confession of another Matthew—a Matteo fixated on money to such an extent that he became a 17th-century incarnation of the hated tax collectors employed by ancient Rome. Petitions were made for Contarelli’s soul at the altar in his chapel, and the surrounding paintings voice the hope that the light of Christ, which in Caravaggio’s composition pierces the darkness to shine on St. Matthew, might reach even the soul of Cardinal Matteo suffering in purgatory.

Interestingly, full restitution was never made for Contarelli’s crimes. The breadth of his mismanagement of funds was so great that Pope Sixtus V closed the case, fearing international repercussions. In a sense, Caravaggio’s painting itself functions as a recompense for Contarelli’s embezzlement, both symbolically and literally. As if acting for the cardinal by proxy, St. Matthew leaves his nets and follows Christ, modeling the repentant behavior Contarelli failed to pursue. Again acting in the cardinal’s behalf, Contarelli’s heirs appropriated a portion of his tainted inheritance to beautify a holy place, giving a form of retribution to the demands of divine justice.

MATERNAL ADVOCACY

Johannes Vermeer, who like Caravaggio was active in the 17th century, is one of the most beloved painters of the Dutch Golden Age. He came from the city of Delft in the Netherlands and was known for his meticulously crafted canvases, usually filled with natural light and virtuosic renderings of texture. Vermeer’s works often feature solitary women in the corner of a room, absorbed in a household task.

The subject matter of Dutch art shifted dramatically after the Reformation. The Netherlands were largely converted to Protestantism, especially Calvinism, which had an extreme intolerance for figural representations of God, Christ, angels, and saints. During the second half of the 16th century, groups of Calvinists in the Low Countries engaged in iconoclastic riots, systematically breaking and pillaging the stained glass, statues, and paintings of Catholic churches. The Iconoclastic Fury (Beeldenstorm) had been quelled by the time Vermeer began painting, but Dutch society still looked askance at traditional religious art. The prosperous middle class in the Dutch Republic favored smaller paintings of cityscapes, landscapes, still life, portraiture, and genre scenes. This last category characterizes much of Vermeer’s output, namely images of daily life.

Vermeer’s Woman Holding a Balance appears, at first, to be a typical genre scene. A well-dressed woman stands pensively in a corner, occupied with a balance and jewelry boxes. In the past, the painting was interpreted as a “moralizing genre scene,” following a popular Calvinist tradition of communicating a heavy-handed moral by depicting foolish men and women engaged in vices. Under this assumption, Vermeer’s woman would be a demonstration of avarice, as she weighs her jewels. In fact the painting was even initially titled A Woman Weighing Pearls to foreground this interpretation. When close examination revealed that there was not so much as a shadow of a pearl on her scales, however, the painting was retitled and its message reconsidered. Indeed, it is difficult to look at this beatific, quiet woman and seriously label her as a corrupt exemplar of avarice.

Rather, this is a painting about good motherhood. The highest ideal for a 17th-century Dutch woman was to be a noble mother who instructed her children in right and wrong and raised promising citizens for the new republic. Vermeer’s woman has a slightly protruding belly, which may indicate that she is pregnant. Holding one of the most ancient emblems of justice in one hand, this mother seems to be pondering much weightier things than the worth of her jewels. In fact, she is likely musing on her duty to teach her unborn baby. That maternal instruction will not only affect the child’s ability to weigh between right and wrong but will ultimately affect his or her fate at Judgment Day when weighed in God’s scales.

The Dutch were remarkably tolerant of different religious groups in their republic. They knew what persecution felt like, having endured the violent enforcement of religious orthodoxy under the rule of the Spanish King Philip II and his successors, followed by harsh Protestant and Catholic regimes in the southern Low Countries. As a result, the newly formed Dutch Republic had an open-door policy to all forms of Protestantism, and the government even offered Jews relative freedom. All were welcome, with the exception of Catholics. And yet even though mass was prohibited and priests were outlawed, the authorities tended to turn a blind eye to the many Catholics in the Netherlands. There is strong evidence that Vermeer was one of these underground believers. Catholic references in his paintings range from brazenly overt to quite subtle. The full depth of maternal advocacy invoked by Woman Holding a Balance is only realized when its Catholic overtones are considered.

It is difficult to discount the shadow of the Virgin Mary that hovers over this expectant young mother in a blue coat with a white scarf draped over her head. Blue and white are traditional colors for the Virgin, and during this same period the Spanish Church insisted that artists dress the Mother of God in white and blue when depicting the Immaculate Conception. Immaculate Conception images envision the Madonna according to St. John’s vision of a woman “with child,” recorded in the book of Revelation: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” It may be significant, in this regard,
that Vermeer’s woman wears a sun-gold dress with her pregnant belly swathed in a glowing patch of sunlight.46

Behind the woman, a Last Judgment scene hangs on the wall, with the dead rising from their graves while saints and apostles flank Christ. The woman seems to join the cast of characters behind her, taking the role of the tenderly interceding Virgin. Her downcast eyes draw attention to the hordes of newly resurrected men and women who appear to clamor around her face, as if raising their arms to call on her gentle advocacy.

The interpretation of the woman as a middle-class Dutch mother is by no means mutually exclusive with Vermeer’s evocation of the Virgin Mary. In Roman Catholic theology, the Lord’s beloved mother is also the spiritual mother of all Christians, so appointed by Christ himself when, looking down from the cross on Calvary, he commanded St. John—and all believers by implication—to “[b]ehold thy mother!”47 The faithful call on Mother Mary to advocate for them, just as any good mother advocates for her children, trusting that her intervention can shift the balance in the scales at the Last Day.

In a way both domestic and eternal in scope, Vermeer enshrines maternal advocacy at the heart of his painting. A tender Marian prayer known as the Salve Regina resonates with the imagery of Woman Holding a Balance and brings together the forces of divine justice, clemency, and advocacy in the early modern Christian cosmos. Most practicing Catholics would have been intimately familiar with the Salve Regina, and many could have recited it by heart:

_Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy. Hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send forth our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!_48

**EMULATING HEAVENLY COURTS**

Imitation played a pivotal role in early modern Christian devotion, with believers striving to conform themselves to Christ. Images of law and justice bear witness to a similar model of imitation. Civic trials emulated the heavenly court, the Church preached the Final Judgment of all souls, and the faithful petitioned the mediating Lamb of God for mercy and asked his hosts of saintly advocates for prayers. The sacred and the secular were closely wound in all aspects of European culture, including the law. At the crux of the intersection of scriptural mandates, legends, legal precedents, and pictorial expositions of jurisprudence was the “Judge of all the earth,” who perfectly exemplifies his own command “to do justly, and to love mercy.”49

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**NOTES**


4 On Christ’s impartiality, see Honorius Augustodunensis’s Elucidarium, an important 12th-century source text for Rogier’s painting; see Clifford Tennis Gerritt Sorensen, trans., “The Elucidarium of Honorius Augustodunensis: Translation and Selected Annotations” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1979), 170.

5 Revelation 5:12.

6 Matthew 25:34. “Venite benedicti patris mei possideat paratum vobis Regnum a constituione mundi.”

7 Matthew 25:41. “Discedite a me maledicti in ignem eternum qui parastus est dyabolo et angelis eius.”

8 For a summary of the Beaune Altarpiece’s comparison to Saint-Laize in the literature, see Lane, “‘Requiem aeternam dona eis,’” 172 and note 37.


10 Job 1:21.


13 Matthew 16:19.


16 I am grateful to my friend and colleague Mark Magleby, director of the BYU Museum of Art, for this insight.


20 See ibid., 62, 70, 72.


24 Although not forcefully relevant to the argument of this article, there is scholarly disagreement about the identity of St. Matthew in Caravaggio’s painting. For two sides of the argument, see Lavin, “Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew,” 85–99, and Sedgwick Wohl, “Light and Dark in the Contarelli Chapel,” 229–58.

25 Matthew 6:24, italics added.


27 Genesis 2:7.

28 Ibid.

29 1 Corinthians 15:21–22.

30 Genesis 2:7.

31 2 Corinthians 4:14; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.

32 For a related analysis, see Lavin, “Caravaggio’s Call of St. Matthew,” 95, 97.

33 See Matthew 4:19.

34 On the universality of Christ’s call, see Lavin, “Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew,” 98.


36 See ibid.

37 See Lavin, “Caravaggio’s Calling of St. Matthew,” 98.

38 See Matthew 4:20.


45 Revelation 12:1–2.

46 I am grateful to a student in my ARTHC 202: World Civilization Since 1500 course at Brigham Young University for this insight.

47 John 19:27.


49 Genesis 18:25; Micah 6:8.