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Author(s): Irving Lavin

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Divine Inspiration in Caravaggio's Two *St. Matthews*

Irving Lavin

For Millard Meiss on his seventieth birthday

It seems fair to say that in the last twenty years there have been two major developments affecting our understanding of Caravaggio's art in the epoch-making period of his maturation in Rome.¹ One of these developments is interpretive, and derives from the proposition that he was more than a realist in the ordinary sense. No one would doubt, especially since the publication in 1955 of Walter Friedländer's *Caravaggio Studies*, that the revolutionary naturalism and proletarian content of his great religious paintings served a deep moral and spiritual purpose. But a considerable body of scholarly literature is now available which tends to show that the seemingly innocent genre and mythological pictures with which Caravaggio's career in Rome began, also carry ulterior meaning – morally ambiguous, perhaps, but certainly much more sophisticated than had been imagined. Hence their unique challenge may be seen to lie in a paradoxical kind of knowing naïveté. This new view helps to make the early works more understandable as preludes to Caravaggio's profound treatment of religious themes in later years; it also makes better sense with respect to the extremely refined patronage the young Caravaggio enjoyed, for his so-called "popular" art was created for an audience that was anything but popular.

The second revelation of recent scholarship is in chronology, and results from the discovery of incontrovertible documentary evidence of the true sequence in which Caravaggio executed the pictures of the Contarelli chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi, which open his mature period as a religious painter.² In the early years of the seventeenth century he painted four canvases for the chapel. These included two narrative scenes for the lateral walls, the calling of St. Matthew on the left, his martyrdom on the right. For the altarpiece Caravaggio did two renderings of Matthew in his role as evangelist composing his gospel (Figs. 1, 27). It was generally assumed that the artist began work with the altarpiece, the first version of which was rejected by the officials of the church and ultimately made its way to Berlin, where it was destroyed by fire in 1945. We now know that the original altarpiece was painted in 1602, only *after* the lateral scenes were completed. The new sequence makes

Caravaggio's development at this pivotal moment much clearer; the austere simplicity and monumentality of the first *St. Matthew*, which are the stamp of his mature style, are no longer a chronological embarrassment.

On the other hand, the later date for the first *St. Matthew* raises a new problem that did not exist before. This concerns the treatment of the saint, whose coarse, low-brow appearance Bellori cites as the reason the picture was refused. He differs utterly from the protagonists of the two lateral scenes, who not only belong to a higher social stratum but are also recognizable as the same person; indeed, one of the changes Caravaggio introduced in the second version of the altarpiece was to make the saint's appearance consistent with that in the other pictures (compare Figs. 1, 2, 3, 27). As long as the first *St. Matthew* was considered the earliest in the series, one could assume that this ungainly figure was Caravaggio's "real" conception of the saint, which he subsequently modified. But now we are forced inevitably to the conclusion that Caravaggio committed a deliberate solecism – Matthew as the author of the gospel was *meant* to be different from the apostle of the historical narrative; and, furthermore, the rudeness of the figure was not an end in itself, but an alternative the artist consciously invented or chose in order to convey some specific idea.

Evidently, the two modern revolutions in Caravaggio studies have related implications. The new date for the first *St. Matthew* provides absolute proof that there is more than meets the eye in the proletarian aspect of Caravaggio's art; hence, also, the second version of the altarpiece may signify something more than a capitulation to the public-minded taste of the authorities.

In order to grasp Caravaggio's historical achievements in both *St. Matthews* a preliminary word on the development of the evangelist portrait in general is in order.³ The type of the seated evangelist writing his gospel was derived in the Early Christian period from ancient depictions of authors composing their works. Sometimes the classical writer was shown alone, sometimes he was accompanied by his Muse, who appears beside him as if dictating his thoughts (cf. Fig. 17). In the course of the Middle Ages, two basic traditions developed out of this classical heritage, one of which emphasized the intellectual, the other the irrational aspect

¹ A practically complete collection of Caravaggio material, with bibliography through 1971, is now available in G. A. Dell'Acqua and M. Cinotti, *Il Caravaggio e le sue grandi opere da San Luigi dei Francesi*, Milan, 1971. Important subsequent studies relevant to the points mentioned in my preamble, by C. L. Frommel, L. Spezzaferro, M. Calvesi, appeared in *Storia dell'arte*, ix-x, 1971; also D. Posner, "Caravaggio's Homosexual Early Works," *Art Quarterly*, xxxiv, 1971, 301–24.

² The chronology of the chapel is summarized by Cinotti, *Caravaggio*, 105ff.

³ On evangelist portraiture generally, see the extensive articles in O.

Schmitt, ed., *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Stuttgart, 1937ff., vi, cols. 448–517; K. Wessel, ed., *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, Stuttgart, 1966ff., II, cols. 452–507; E. Kirschbaum, ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, 4 vols., Rome, 1968–72, IV, 695–713.

On the ancient author portraits, cf. K. Schefold, *Die Bildnisse der antiken Dichter, Redner und Denker*, Basel, 1943; H.-I. Marrou, *Mousikos Aner. Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains* (Université de Grenoble, Bibliothèque de l'Institut français de Naples, ser. I, Vol. IV), Grenoble, 1938.

On the inspired author in art, G. Kleiner, *Die Inspiration des Dichters (Kunstwerk und Deutung, Heft 5)*, Berlin, 1949.



1 Caravaggio, *St. Matthew Composing His Gospel*, first version. Destroyed, formerly Berlin, Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum

of the creative process. In Byzantine art, the evangelist was shown alone as a contemplative figure intently composing or meditating upon his text (Fig. 4). In the Latin West, on the other hand, the idea of inspiration was represented as a supernatural event by showing the evangelist looking up toward his symbol, which is often a miraculous messenger from heaven (Fig. 5).⁴ These attributes were based on a vision of the prophet Ezekiel (1, 10; also Rev. 4, 7), for whom the heavens opened revealing four creatures with the aspects of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. The distribution of the symbols among the evangelists that became canonical in the West was established by St. Jerome in the preface to his commentary on Matthew.⁵ Jerome assigned the man to Matthew, for reasons we shall mention presently. The creatures had wings, and in art Matthew's man was represented as a full-fledged angel. In the Renaissance a sort of fusion between the intellectual and irrational interpretations was achieved: the evangelist was still generally accompanied by his mysterious symbol, but the latter was normally shown nearby as a close collaborator or advisor rather than an otherworldly apparition to the writer.

The First *St. Matthew*

Caravaggio's first *St. Matthew* clearly adheres to this Renaissance tradition. In fact, Caravaggio adopted a common type, itself no doubt derived from classical models (cf. Fig. 17), in which Matthew was shown seated, cross-legged, with the angel beside him. Particularly close in one way or another are an engraving by Agostino Veneziano after Raphael (Fig. 6) and a series of studies for an altarpiece by the Milanese painter Giovan Ambrogio Figino (Fig. 7), which Caravaggio must have recalled from his apprentice days in the capitol of his native Lombardy.⁶ While it alludes to this tradition, the first *St. Matthew* incorporates three major thematic anomalies, each of which is evidently unprecedented in the long history of evangelist portraiture. One concerns the text of the gospel, another the appearance

of the evangelist, and another the role of the angel. We shall consider these innovations in sequence; but I trust it will emerge that they are interdependent and that, far from being a challenge to the "establishment," together they constitute no less than a coherent and triumphant reaffirmation of the meaning of the gospel for Christianity in general and for the established Church in particular.

The Hebrew Text

The first of the innovations is that the evangelist writes in Hebrew (Fig. 8), rather than Greek or Latin as had always been the case before. On one level the Hebrew script is natural enough. By an unbroken tradition of the Church, the evangelist Matthew was identified with the Jewish publican or tax collector, named Levi, whom Christ summoned to the apostolate as he passed the counting-house, and who was said to have written his gospel in his native tongue before he left the Holy Land for Egypt, where he was eventually martyred.⁷ Caravaggio might simply have engaged in a bit of Early Christian archaeology, symptomatic of his passion for realistic accuracy of detail. In that case, however, it would also be symptomatic of a more general phenomenon, namely the revival of interest in the early Church that characterized the Counter-Reformatory spirit of the later sixteenth century.⁸ One of the primary goals of the period was to purify and rejuvenate the Church through a study of its early history, and a return to its primitive values. This line of thought, in turn, suggests that Caravaggio may have had another, deeper motive, as well, inspired not only by the historical fact that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, but also by a contemporary resonance in the evangelist's reason for doing so. Jerome, who is the most explicit source on the subject, records in the preface to his commentary on Matthew that the evangelist wrote his gospel when and in the language he did in order that it might serve to buttress the faith of those of his own people who had believed in Christ and who "adhered in vain to the shadow of the law, although the substance of the Gospel

⁴ The basic distinction between Byzantine and Western evangelist portraiture was analyzed by W. Weisbach, "Die Darstellung der Inspiration auf mittelalterlichen Evangelistenbildern," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana*, xvi, 1939, 101-27. The symbols appear in Byzantine evangelist portraits only sporadically, and later than in the West (cf. *Reallex. z. byz. Kunst*, II, cols. 469ff.; G. Vikan, ed., *Illuminated Manuscripts from American Collections. An Exhibition in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Princeton, 1973, 144). For the classical background of the type illustrated in Figure 5, of which Caravaggio's second *St. Matthew* may be regarded as a variant, see H. Buchthal, "A Byzantine Miniature of the Fourth Evangelist and its Relatives," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xv, 1961, 134.

⁵ "Prima hominis facies Matthaum significat, qui quasi de homine exorsus est scribere *Liber generationis Jesu Christi, filii David, filii Abraham*"; Matt. 1, 1; J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, 221 vols., Paris, 1844-77, xxvi, col. 19 (hereinafter cited as Migne, *P.L.*).

⁶ Depictions of Matthew seated cross-legged with the angel beside him that have been noted in connection with Caravaggio are: engraving by Agostino Veneziano after Raphael (E. Maselli, "Da una cartella romana del Caravaggio," *Spazio*, II, No. 5, 1951, 11f.); Simone Peterzano, fresco in the Certosa di Garegnano at Milan (W. Friedländer, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton, 1955, fig. 66A); Ambrogio Figino, studies at Windsor for the *St. Matthew* in San Raffaele (*ibid.*, 97, fig. 65; R. P. Ciardi, *Giovan*

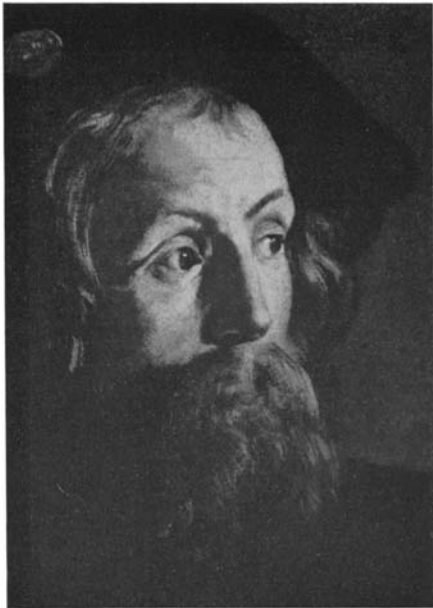
Ambrogio Figino, Florence, 1968, pls. 257ff.).

The following may also be cited: fresco by B. Luini in the Santuario at Saronno (C. Binda, *Il santuario di Saronno*, n.d., ill. page 30); engravings by Johann Ladenspelder (A. Bartsch, *Le peintre-graveur*, 18 vols., Wurzburg, 1920, IX, 29, 5), and by Aldegrever after a design by Georg Pencz (*ibid.*, VIII, 211, 57).

The motive of the seated figure with crossed legs has been studied by J. J. Tikkanen, *Die Beinstellungen in der Kunstgeschichte (Acta societatis scientiarum fennicae)*, XLII, 1), Helsingfors, 1912, 150ff.; for figures writing in this position, 179f. On the early development of the seated evangelist with crossed legs, cf. A. Boeckler, "Die Evangelistenbilder der Adagruppe," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, III-IV, 1952-53, 131f.; E. Rosenbaum, "The Evangelist Portraits of the Ada School and their Models," *The Art Bulletin*, XXXVIII, 1956, 84.

⁷ For a comprehensive study of the tradition, see D. Gla, *Die Originalsprache des Matthäus-evangeliums*, Paderborn and Münster, 1887.

⁸ Cf. P. Fremiotti, *La riforma cattolica del secolo decimosesto e gli studi di archeologia cristiana*, Rome, 1926. On an aspect of the Early Christian revival in church architecture, see recently E. Hubala, "Roma sotterranea barocca," *Das Münster*, 1965, 157ff., and the bibliography cited there.



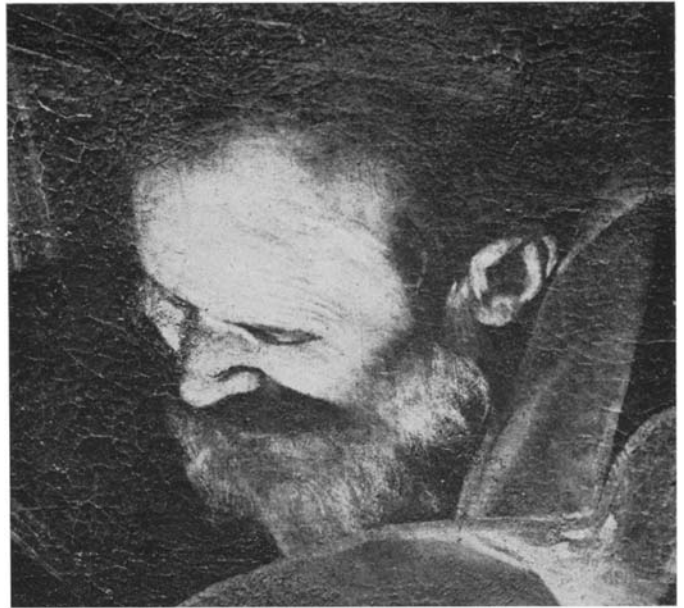
2 Caravaggio, *Calling of St. Matthew* (detail). Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi (after Dell'Acqua, *Caravaggio*, pl. iv)

had come."⁹ Seen in this light Caravaggio's innovation acquires a new significance as an explicit allusion to the role of the gospel in what was one of the primary concerns of the Counter-Reformatory Church as well: to encourage the adherence of wavering Christians to the true Catholic faith.

Judging from the emphasis he placed on the manual process of writing, Caravaggio must surely have had in mind a further detail of the legend, one that reflects an underlying concern with what might be called the autograph authenticity of the first gospel. It was said that Matthew actually wrote his gospel *in his own hand*. The prime witness is again Jerome, who in another passage mentioning the Hebrew text and Jewish beneficiaries of this gospel, adds that the manuscript existed in the library of the martyr Pamphilius at Caesarea.¹⁰ The same idea appears in the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus of Voragine, the great thirteenth-century compendium of the lives of the saints. The biography of Matthew begins with a discussion of the evangelist's name. One of the etymologies Jacobus gives is that Matthew derives from "manus" and "theos," the hand of God, which he explains as referring to the writing of the gospel. At the end of the biography Jacobus says specifically that Matthew wrote the gospel in his own hand and tells

⁹ "Primus omnium Matthaëus est publicanus, cognomento Levi, qui Evangelium in Judæa Hebraeo sermone edidit, ob eorum vel maxime causam, qui in Jesum crediderant ex Judæis, et nequaquam legis umbram succedente Evangelii veritate, servabant," Migne, *P.L.*, xxvi, 18. ("The first evangelist is Matthew, the publican, who was surnamed Levi. He published his Gospel in Judæa in the Hebrew language, chiefly for the sake of Jewish believers in Christ, who adhered in vain to the shadow of the law, although the substance of the Gospel had come"; *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*, 14 vols., Grand Rapids, 1956, vi, 495.)

¹⁰ "Matthaëus, qui et Levi, ex publicano apostolus, primus in Judæa propter eos qui ex circumcissione crediderant, Evangelium Christi Hebraicis litteris verbisque composuit: quod quis postea in Graecum transtulerit, non satis certum est. Porro ipsum Hebraicum habetur usque hodie in Caesariensi bibliotheca, quam Pamphilius martyr studiosissime confecit. Mihi quoque a Nazaraeis, qui in Beroea, urbe



3 Caravaggio, *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (detail), turned 90 degrees. Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi (photo: Alinari)

the story of its having been discovered in the year 500 with the bones of the Cypriot Jew St. Barnabas.¹¹

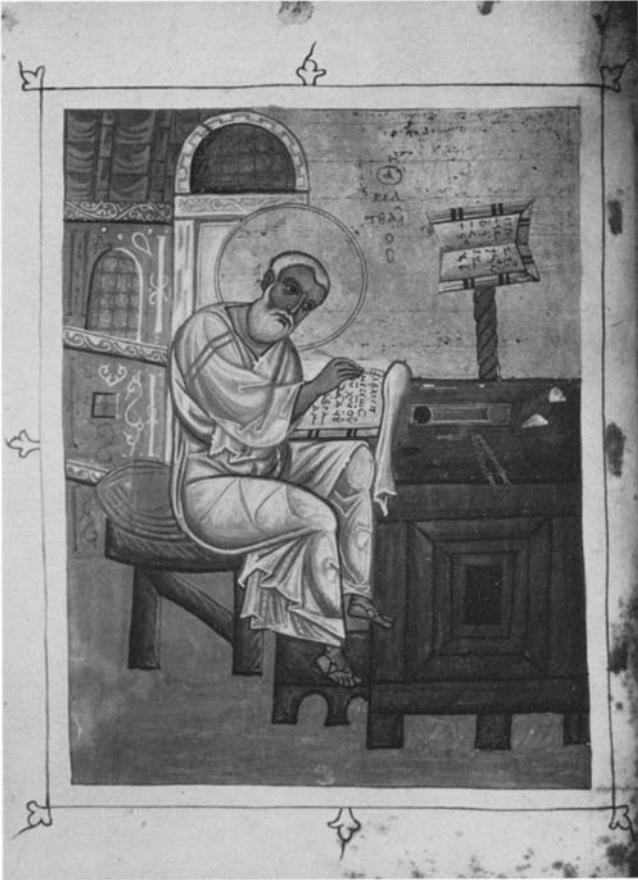
It is clear, therefore, that Caravaggio's picture incorporates a web of traditions that had been woven about the language, the purpose and the physical existence of the autograph manuscript of the first gospel. These traditions are unique to the first gospel, and their significance, and ultimately that of Caravaggio's picture, is to be found in the significance of the first gospel itself.

Matthew enjoys pride of place among the synoptic gospels for two overlapping reasons, for which Jerome, once more, gives the chief testimony. He stated that Matthew was the first evangelist to commit his memories to writing, a view that was universally accepted until modern times.¹² In the strictest chronological sense, therefore, the gospel of St. Matthew was the first divinely inspired Christian text. As far as the written word of God is concerned, Matthew was the spearhead, the herald of the new Church, which replaced both the Church of the Jews and the Church of the Gentiles. The second factor that determined the primacy of Matthew among the gospels lay in its content – notably that of the first chapter, which begins with the famous recitation of the fourteen generations from Abraham to Jesus, and

Syriae, hoc volumine utuntur, describendi facultas fuit"; *De viris illustribus*, chap. 3; Migne, *P.L.*, xxiii, col. 643. ("Matthew, also called Levi, and aforesometimes publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judæa in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilius so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who used it"; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, iii, 362.)

¹¹ Jacobus of Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 7 vols., London, 1900, v, 150, 158: ". . . manus, that is a hand, and theos, that is God, as it were the hand of God . . . by writing of the gospel of God"; "His gospel that he had written with his own hand, was found with the bones of St. Barnabas . . . in the year of our Lord five hundred."

¹² Cf. notes 9, 10 above.



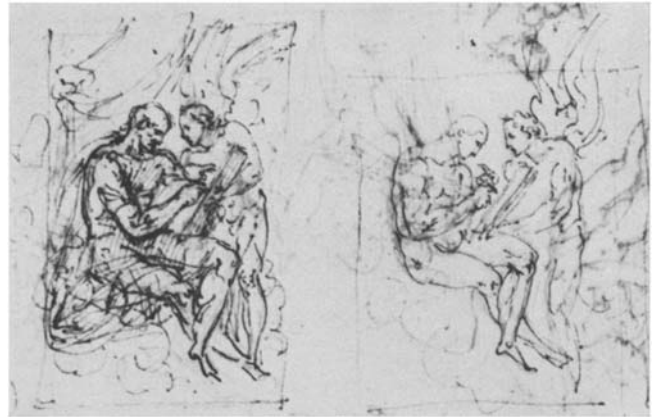
4 *St. Matthew*. Venice, Bibl. Marciana, ms Gr. 548, fol. 55v (photo: Fiorentini, Venice; courtesy Dept. of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)



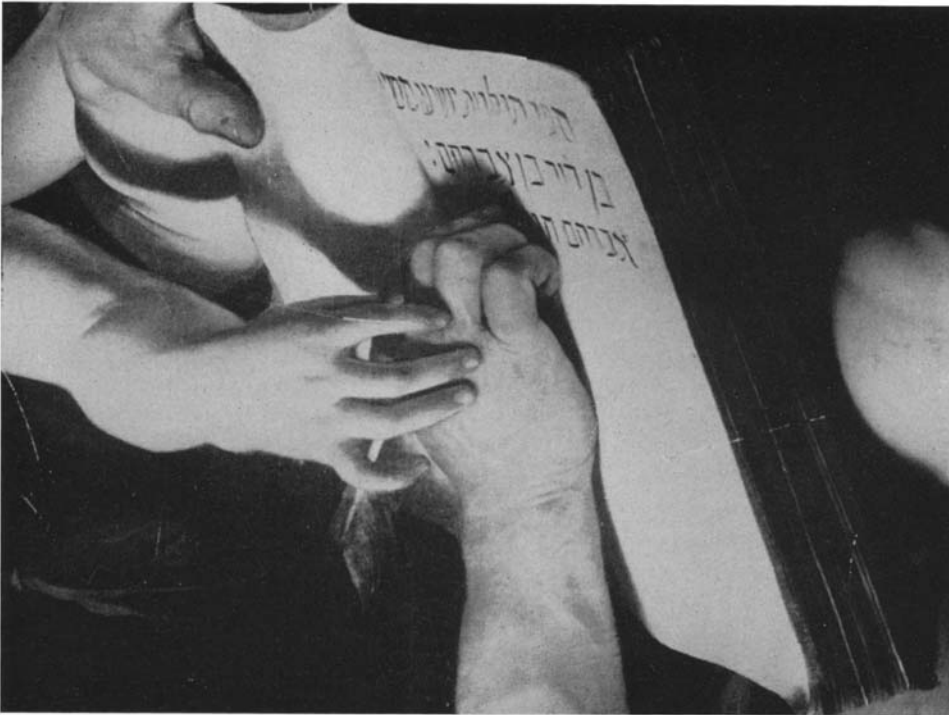
5 *St. Matthew*. Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, ms 1190, fol. 14v (photo: Garnier)



6 Agostino Veneziano, after Raphael, *St. Matthew*, engraving



7 Giovan Ambrogio Figino, studies for *St. Matthew*, drawing. Windsor Castle



8 Detail of Figure 1, turned 90 degrees

ends with the Nativity. Matthew is thus, *par excellence*, the gospel of the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh, the manhood of God. It was this fact that led Jerome to assign the man-creature described by Ezekiel to Matthew.¹³ Hence Matthew not only wrote down the sacred message for the first time, but in so doing stressed the First Coming of the Lord, the intervention of the Divine Word on earth and its continuity with the past.

The most eloquent demonstration that these considerations – the pioneering and incarnational aspects of Matthew's gospel – were indeed uppermost in Caravaggio's thought is provided by the words which the evangelist writes (Figs. 8, 9a). It was common in evangelist portraits where the text is visible for it to contain the opening words of the gospel: "Liber generationis" in the case of Matthew. What distinguishes Caravaggio's depiction in this context is the precise point to which the writing has proceeded. Matthew has already recorded the first verse, which is a summary statement of Christ's derivation from Abraham, prophesied in Genesis as the father of the multitude of the saved; and from David, the prototype of the Savior: "The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Matthew is just completing the next phrase, "Abraham begat," which begins the genealogy proper. The lineage of salvation has been announced, the founding father has been named and his seed is being sown. The light of a new age has dawned.

It is evident, in sum, that the way Matthew wrote – in Hebrew and in his own hand – and what he wrote – the first account of the incarnation – are intimately connected. They are the very form and substance of the Divine Word, the

first graphic message delivered to the world of the Lord's coming. The basic imagery of Caravaggio's picture thus also becomes evident: Matthew's learning to write from the angel is a metaphor for the world's learning the truth from God; and the chiaroscuro is a metaphor for the divine illumination. Matthew stands (or rather sits, in his capacity as evangelist) at the threshold between ignorance and knowledge and darkness and light.

The gospel in Caravaggio's picture is remarkable, however, not only because it is in Hebrew and because of what it says, but also because of the text itself. The manuscript that Jerome mentioned had long since disappeared; this presented no problem, so long as the reliability of the Church's tradition went unchallenged.¹⁴ But at the turn of the sixteenth century Erasmus of Rotterdam raised the awful question whether the received text was indeed translated from a Hebrew original; it seemed more probable to him, he said, that Matthew was written in the same language as the other gospels. From that point on the issue became a burning one in the polemics between Protestant and Catholic theologians, because upon it seemed to rest the credibility of the whole edifice of the traditional Church. This was the inevitable consequence of the reformers' insistence upon the *inspiratio verbalis*, the direct verbal inspiration of the bible, which God had "dictated into the pen," *in calamum dictavit*, as the saying went. Obviously, the Church could make such a claim only for a received text that was translated from the Hebrew, in accordance with its tradition. The doubt cast upon the Church's teaching was regarded by the Catholics as a threat to the very foundation of faith.

¹³ Cf. note 5 above.

¹⁴ For what follows, see Gla, *Originalsprache*, 1ff.

9 Caravaggio's text of the opening verses of Matthew, compared with those of Münster and Du Tillet

ספר תולדות ישוע המשיח
 בן דוד בן אברהם;
 אברהם הול

- 1) The book of the generations of Jesus Christ
 the son of David, the son of Abraham.
- 2) Abraham begat

a. Caravaggio text and translation

ספר
 תולדות ישוע
 המשיח בן דוד בן אברהם
 הוליד את יצחק ויצחק הוליד ארתי

b. Münster 1537

בשורה
 ספר

תולדות ישוע המשיח
 בן דוד בן אברהם;
 אברהם הוליד את יצחק

d. Münster 1557



ספר תולדות ישוע המשיח בן דוד בן אברהם
 הוליד את יצחק ויצחק הוליד ארתי
 אברהם הוליד את יצחק

c. Münster 1551

ספר

תולדות ישוע המשיח
 בן דוד בן אברהם;
 אברהם הוליד את יצחק

e. Münster 1582



תולדות ישו בן דוד בן אברהם
 אברהם הוליד את יצחק ויצחק

f. Du Tillet 1555

Hence an often acrimonious controversy arose about two once-famous Hebrew versions of Matthew printed in the sixteenth century.¹⁵ One of these was first published at Basel in 1537 by Sebastian Münster, a Protestant Hebraist who had been a Franciscan monk.¹⁶ Münster reports in his dedication to Henry VIII of England that he had found among the Jews a lacunous text, which he filled out and completed for his edition – so that, as he says, echoing St. Jerome, Christians as well as non-Christians might be drawn to Christ.¹⁷ Münster's text was reprinted no less than three times in the century, in 1551, 1557 and 1582.

The second version, practically complete, and with many differences from Münster's, came to light in 1553. Jean Du Tillet, Bishop of St. Briec, who was then traveling in Italy, found a new Hebrew manuscript of Matthew among the Jews.¹⁸ In August of that year Pope Julius III had issued a decree suppressing the Talmud, at the instigation of the anti-Semitic Cardinal Pietro Caraffa, who was then the Inquisitor General and later became Pope Paul IV. The decree was carried out in Rome on Rosh Hashanna (the Jewish New Year), when not only the Talmuds but also every other Hebrew book obtainable were confiscated. The manuscript found by Du Tillet, which is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, was doubtless among them. Du Tillet brought it back to Paris and commissioned a Hebrew scholar, Jean Mercier, to edit the text, which was published at Paris in 1555.¹⁹

There were thus available to Caravaggio two Hebrew versions of the gospel, one published by a Protestant, the other by a high official of the Church. The two versions differ at several points in the opening verse (Fig. 9).²⁰ Münster's reads in translation, "The book of the generations of Jesus Christ son of David . . .," whereas Du Tillet's reads, "These are the generations of Jesus son of David . . ." The differences are that Münster starts with "Book," Du Tillet with "These." Münster uses the full form for Jesus, "Jeshua," Du Tillet the abbreviated "Jeshu"; and Du Tillet omits the word for Christ. Comparison leaves not the slightest question that Caravaggio followed Sebastian Münster's version, with which the text in the painting agrees in all these details. We can be practically certain, in fact, that he copied the 1582 edition, since the typography there is virtually identical to the orthography in the painting.²¹

One might assume that Caravaggio chose to follow Sebastian Münster's text simply because the 1582 edition was the most recently printed Hebrew version of the gospel. But he introduced one small yet very significant substantive change which suggests that he had something else in mind. He corrected a mistake in Münster's grammar. Münster had introduced the article (ה) before the word "generations" (תולדות) in the *status constructus*, which is something like saying in English, "The Book of the the generations . . ." This, indeed, was one of the numerous errors of grammar and syntax for which Münster's text was criticized from the outset.²² Caravaggio properly omitted the article, probably on the basis of the Du Tillet text which, though it has many faults of its own, is correct in this respect.

Evidently, then, Caravaggio was at pains to give a purified version of Münster's text. His reason is plain. Münster's text corresponds in this passage exactly with the Vulgate, whereas Du Tillet's does not. The chances are that the manuscript Münster used lacked the beginning, which he supplied himself by translating the Vulgate into Hebrew, introducing the grammatical error. But since Münster provided no means of distinguishing his own interpolations in the publication (for which he was also criticized at the time), his text was *prima facie* confirmation of the traditional derivation of the Vulgate from a Hebrew original.

Matthew therefore composes in perfect Hebrew a gospel with which the received version is in perfect accord. The angel's literal intervention in the writing is doubly critical. It serves to document the authenticity of the Hebrew gospel as the source of the Vulgate; and it illustrates the direct verbal inspiration into the pen on which the reformers insisted. Caravaggio simply took the Protestants at their word, so to speak, and – with what he must have thought a delicious irony – turned it into a graphic witness to the veracity of the Church's teaching.

Levi-Socrates-Matthew

We have already alluded to the second anomaly of the altarpiece. The evangelist does not look like a Jew, nor does he look like the apostle in the lateral scenes; in fact, he does not look like an author at all. He is a homely individual whose gross and vulgar appearance is matched by his illiteracy. To a certain extent – the bald pate, wrinkled

¹⁵ Cf. A. Herbst, "Über die von Sebastian Münster und Jean Du Tillet herausgegebenen hebraischen Übersetzungen des Evangelium Matthaei," Ph.D. diss., Göttingen, 1875.

¹⁶ V. Hantzsch, *Sebastian Münster. Leben, Werke, Wissenschaftliche Bedeutung* (Abhandlung der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, xviii, 3), Leipzig, 1898, 177, n. 242; F. Secret, "Notes sur Guillaume Postel," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance. Travaux et Documents*, xxii, 1960, 377ff.; K. H. Burmeister, *Sebastian Münster. Versuch eines biographischen Gesamtbildes* (Basler Beiträge zur Geisteswissenschaft, 91), Basel-Stuttgart, 1963, 83ff.; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16 vols., New York, 1971, xii, cols. 505f.

¹⁷ "Diui Matthaei Euangelium sub auspicijs tuis, potentissime Rex, in natua sua, hoc est, Hebraica lingua, non qualiter apud Hebracorum vulgus laecerum inueni, sed a me redintegratum, & in unum corpus redactum emitimus . . . ut non solum Christo initiati, uerum & qui alieni sunt à Christo, hac occasione traherētur ad Christum"; *Evangelium secundum Matthaeum in lingua hebraica cum versione latina atque succinctis annotationibus Sebastiani Munsteri*, Basel, 1537; cited from the 1582 Basel

edition.

¹⁸ H. J. Schonfield, *An Old Hebrew Text of St Matthew's Gospel*, Edinburgh, 1927; A. Marx, "The Polemical Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Related Subjects, in Memory of Abraham Solomon Freidus (1867–1923)*, New York, 1929, 77of.; M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1967, 295. On Du Tillet, cf. *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, Paris, 1933ff., xii, cols. 916f.

¹⁹ *Evangelium hebraicum Matthaei, recens è Iudaeorum penetralibus erutum, cum interpretatione Latina, ad vulgatum quoad fieri potuit, accommodata*, Paris, 1555. On Mercier, cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, xi, cols. 1381f.

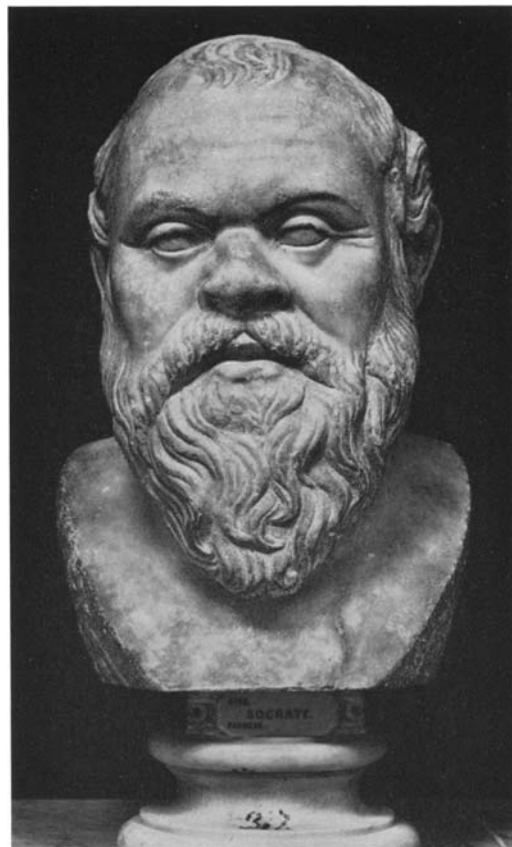
²⁰ All the 16th-century editions of the texts are reproduced in Figure 9.

²¹ The 1557 and 1582 editions of Münster's text differ in that in the former the end of the word "Abraham" in verse 2 is abbreviated whereas in the latter – as in Caravaggio – the last letter is included.

²² See Herbst, *Übersetzungen*, 4ff.



10 Giovan Ambrogio Figino, *St. Matthew*. Milan, San Raffaele (photo: Perotti, Milan)



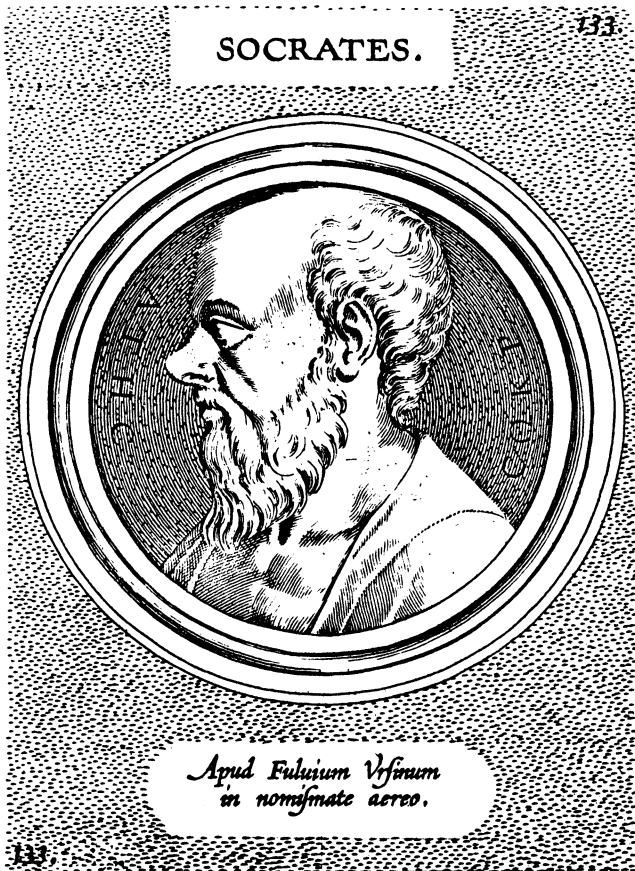
11 Bust of Socrates. Naples, Museo Nazionale (photo: Anderson)



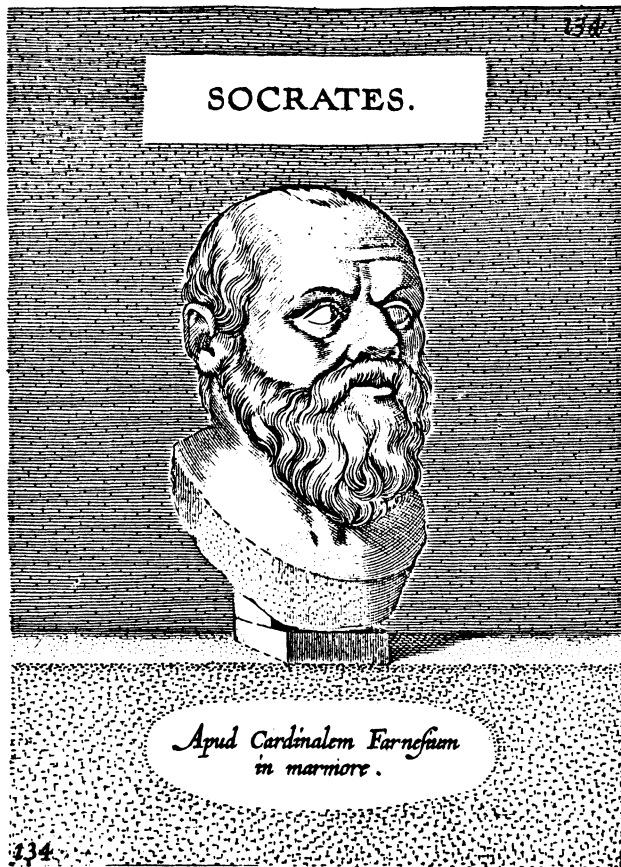
12 Raphael, *School of Athens* (detail). Rome, Vatican (photo: Alinari)



13 Detail of Figure 12



14 Portrait of Socrates, engraving (from T. Gallaeus, *Illustrium Imagines . . .*, Antwerp, 1598, pl. 133)



15 Portrait of Socrates, engraving (from Gallaeus, pl. 134)



16 Detail of Figure 12



17 Sarcophagus of Ulpia Eutychia, detail of the lid. Berlin, Staatliche Museen



18 Terra-cotta statuette. London, British Museum



19 Terra-cotta statuette. London, British Museum



20 Bronze relief. Naples, Museo Nazionale (photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome)

forehead and short beard – Caravaggio's figure was anticipated by the *St. Matthew* as finally executed in Milan by Ambrogio Figino (Fig. 10).²³ But Caravaggio introduced a completely new element which adds another physiognomical paradox. It has long been recognized that Matthew's features are those of none other than the father of ancient pagan philosophy, Socrates.²⁴ The bowling-ball head, wide-set, bulging eyes, blunt nose and the stocky gnarled body – all unmistakably conform to the image of Socrates as we know it from many ancient sources that describe his Silenus-like features and unrefined manners, and from preserved portraits (Fig. 11).²⁵ According to one tradition Socrates' father was a stone mason, and he himself practiced the lowly trade of marble-worker and sculptor.²⁶

The familiar classical type was first revived, it seems, by Raphael in his figure of Socrates teaching a group of disciples at the left of Plato in the *School of Athens* (Figs. 12, 13);²⁷ Raphael must have taken as a model one of the ancient portraits then visible in Rome, which were later gathered together and illustrated in a series of publications on illustrious men of antiquity, the most famous being Fulvio Orsini's *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium* of 1570.²⁸ Orsini, who was co-rector of the Vatican Library, died in Rome in 1600, two years after a new and enlarged volume of engravings was published by Theodore Galle (Figs. 14, 15). These works helped to establish a standard and highly individualized Socrates-formula, so there can be no doubt that Caravaggio deliberately intended to evoke the man whom the ancients regarded as the wisest of all. The vulgar appearance of the figure resulted not from democratizing Matthew but from Socratizing him.

Raphael's composition may even have suggested the association between Matthew and Socrates, for Vasari identified as the evangelist with his angel the group just below of an old man seated and writing in a book, with a youth beside him holding a tablet (Fig. 16).²⁹ We shall

presently see quite independent evidence that Caravaggio did study Raphael's Socrates figure, and Vasari's explanation of the fresco as a Christian allegory reconciling philosophy and astrology with theology provides a hint as to the motivation. But why did Caravaggio combine the author of the first gospel with the father of ancient philosophy, and why did he show the resultant composite as the illiterate writer of a Hebrew text?

Before considering these questions of meaning, it is well to point out that the reference to antiquity may help to elucidate various formal aspects of the picture. The composition is closely anticipated in a group appearing on the lid of a sarcophagus now in Berlin, acquired in Rome in the 1840's, which includes scenes of intellectual life; in one of these an old man, whose features could easily be taken as Socrates', is seated with legs crossed while an inspiring Muse at his side holds the diptych on which he writes (Fig. 17).³⁰ A more personal relationship between an old man and a nubile adolescent appears in certain ancient terra cottas, which have been interpreted as depictions of Silenus teaching Bacchus, or simply as genre scenes showing a schoolmaster with his pupil; but Socrates comes readily to mind (Figs. 18, 19).³¹ There are also reliefs showing a winged figure of Eros with a diptych between a seated woman and a standing old man (Fig. 20); although the most recent view is that they represent the education of Eros, these reliefs used to be considered illustrations of the famous passage in Plato's *Symposium*, where Socrates described his conception of ideal love, inspired by the sorceress Diotima.³² Indeed, Caravaggio seems here to have adapted the Socratic ideal to illustrate the relationship between heavenly wisdom and earthly ignorance, a sublimated echo of the erotic content in some of his earlier works.³³

Visual tradition apart, there were three basic reasons that Socrates was relevant to the message Caravaggio wished to

²³ Figino's altarpiece was first published, and Caravaggio's dependence on it observed, by R. Longhi, "Ambrogio Figino e due citazioni del Caravaggio," *Paragone*, v, 1954 (July, No. 55), 37f. Cf. more recently, Ciardi, *Figino*, 96ff., pl. 218.

²⁴ The Socratic appearance of Caravaggio's Matthew seems first to have been observed by Kleiner, *Inspiration*, 41. Cf. also Friedländer, *Caravaggio Studies*, 125; H. Wagner, *Michelangelo da Caravaggio*, Bern, 1958, 58.

²⁵ On ancient portraits of Socrates, cf. R. Kekule von Stradonitz, "Die Bildnisse des Sokrates," *Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, 1908; G. M. A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks*, London, 1965, 109ff.

²⁶ See page 74 below.

²⁷ Wagner, *Caravaggio*, 58, n. 258, with reference to Raphael's figure. Cf. generally, A. Pigler, "Sokrates in der Kunst der Neuzeit," *Die Antike*, xv, 1938, 281–94.

²⁸ On Orsini's *Imagines*, cf. P. de Nolhac, *La bibliothèque de Fulvio Orsini (Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études, 74)*, Paris, 1887, 40ff.; Kekule von Stradonitz, "Bildnisse," 6ff.; also, J. H. Jongkees, *Fulvio Orsini's Imagines*

and the Portrait of Aristotle (*Archaeologica Traiectina*, iv), Groningen, 1960, 3ff.

²⁹ Cf. L. Dussler, *Raphael*, New York, 1971, 73ff.; G. Milanese, ed., G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scrittori ed architettori . . .*, 9 vols. Florence, 1878–1906, iv, 330ff. H. Röttgen, who took no note of the Socrates problem, suggested this figure as a source for Caravaggio's group ("Caravaggio-Probleme," *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, xx, 1969, 155).

³⁰ Sarcophagus of Ulpia Eutychia; Marrou, *Mousikos Aner* (cited in note 3 above), 152ff., No. 197; Kleiner, *Inspiration*, 50; M. Wegner, *Die Musen-sarkophage*, Berlin, 1966, 13, No. 16.

³¹ A. Rumpf, "Ein einzig dastehender Fall," in *Analecta archaeologica. Festschrift Fritz Fremersdorf*, Cologne, 1960, 95, pl. 21, figs. c-e.

³² *Ibid.*, 93ff.; cf. Kekule von Stradonitz, "Bildnisse," 43f., No. 27, 57f.; Richter, *Portraits*, 117f.

³³ See especially the articles by Frommel and Posner referred to in note 1 above; also C. Frommel, "Caravaggio und seine Modelle," *Castrum Peregrini*, xcvi, 1971, 21–56.

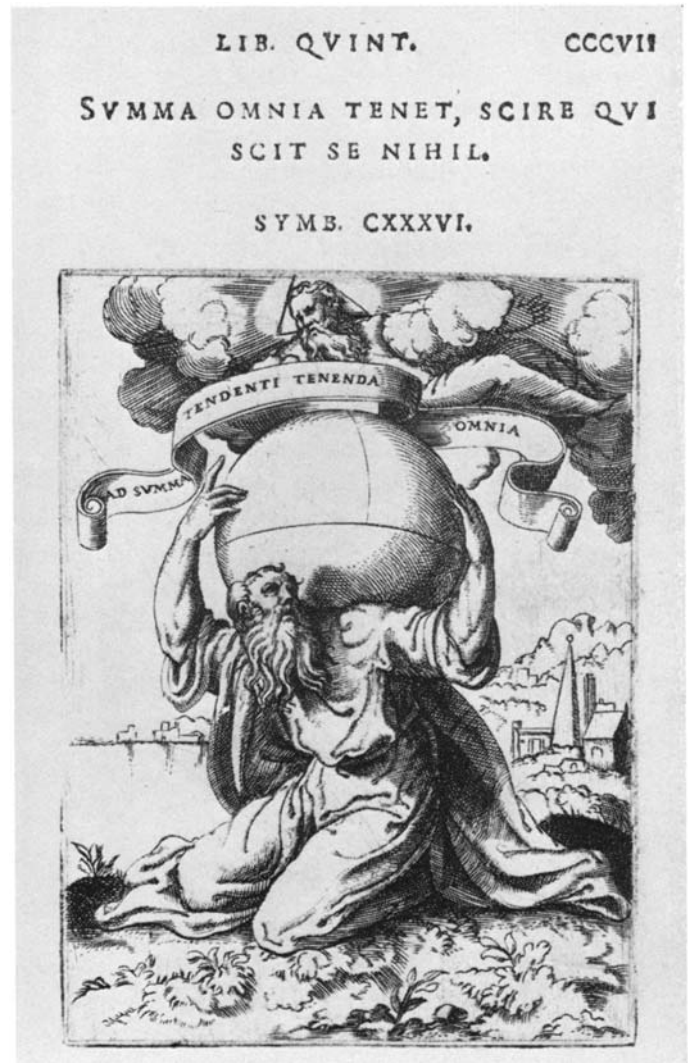


21 Engraving from A. Bocchi, *Symbolicarum quaestionum . . .*, Bologna, 1574, vi

convey.³⁴ To begin with, Socrates was divinely inspired. I refer in particular to his notorious demon, the mysterious voice he heard all through his life, which is mentioned repeatedly in the ancient sources and has been the subject of endless discussion ever since.³⁵ The *daimonion ti*, as Plato refers to it in the *Apology*, was generally a negative force that

³⁴ For a recent general introduction to Socrates and the literature concerning him, cf. F. Adorno, *Introduzione a Socrate*, Bari, 1970. Extensive bibliographies will be found in P. K. Bizoukides, *Ἐπιστημονικαὶ πηγαὶ περὶ Σωκράτους*, Leipzig, 1921, and V. de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Le problème de Socrate. Le Socrate historique et le Socrate de Platon*, Paris, 1952, 471–566. A useful compilation of translations of ancient and early medieval sources is J. Ferguson, *Socrates. A Source Book*, London, 1970; some later sources are translated in H. Spiegelberg, *The Socratic Enigma. A Collection of Testimonies Through Twenty-Four Centuries*, Indianapolis, etc., 1964.

Socrates played an extremely important role in the thought of the Early Christian fathers, and by far the most valuable studies of the Socratic tradition are devoted to this period: see in particular, A. Harnack, *Sokrates und die alte Kirche*, Giessen, 1901; J. Geffcken, *Sokrates und das alte Christentum*, Heidelberg, 1908; G. Natali, *Socrate nel giudizio dei padri apostolici. Contributo alla storia delle relazioni fra paganesimo e cristianesimo nascente*, Ascoli Piceno, 1912; E. Benz, "Christus und Sokrates in der alten Kirche (Ein Beitrag zum altkirchlichen Verständnis des Märtyrers und des Martyriums)," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*



22 Engraving from A. Bocchi, *Symbolicarum quaestionum . . .*, Bologna, 1574, cccvii

forewarned him or his friends not to undertake various actions they were contemplating. On occasion, however, the voice was also said to have spoken positively, exhorting him to things he ought to do. The stories of the demon, and his conviction that he was called to his philosophical mission by God's will, seemed to confirm the supernatural

und die Kunde der älteren Kirchen, XLIII, 1950–51, 195–224. For an influence of Socratic imagery in the visual arts at this period, cf. G. M. A. Hanfmann, "Socrates and Christ," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, LX, 1957, 205–33.

For Socrates in the later Middle Ages, T. Deman, "Socrate dans l'œuvre de S. Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, xxix, 1940, 177–205. For the Renaissance, R. Marcel, "Saint Socrate patron de l'humanisme," *Revue internationale de philosophie*, v, 1951, 135–43; M. A. Raschini, *Interpretazioni socratiche. Volume I (Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di filosofia. Facoltà di magistero dell'università di Genova, x)*, Milan, 1970. A model contribution is that of B. Böhm, *Sokrates im achtzehnten Jahrhundert. Studien zum Werdegange des modernen Persönlichkeitsbewusstseins*, Neumünster, 1966.

³⁵ Among works devoted specifically to the demon of Socrates and its interpretations may be mentioned, G. Olearius, "De genio Socratis," Ph.D. diss., Leipzig, 1702, in T. Stanley, *Historia philosophiae*, Leipzig, 1711, 130–60; C. R. Volquardsen, *Das Dämonium des Sokrates und seine Interpreten*, Kiel, 1862; A. Willing, "De Socratis daemionio quae antiquis temporibus fuerint opiniones," Ph.D. diss., Jena, Leipzig, 1909.

origin of Socrates' wisdom. For the Renaissance Neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino it was preferable to call the spirit a "good angel," rather than a demon.³⁶

Secondly, Socrates held a leading place among the ancient philosophers who were regarded as having anticipated Christianity. He was accorded this exceptional position for a variety of reasons – historical, personal and intellectual. Historically, as the man who first turned pagan thought from speculative cosmology to earthly moral philosophy, he planted a seed that would flower in the Christian code of ethics. Personally, many details of his biography were viewed as fulfillments of the Christian ideal: his disdain for worldly pleasures, his manner of speaking in parables, his performance of wonders, his steadfastness in the face of persecution, his embrace of an unjust death, his sects of followers. Parallels such as these comprise a veritable genre of Christian apologetic writing (which has continued into modern times) in which Socrates was likened to Christ, of whom he was the outstanding pagan prototype.³⁷ Above all, it was on the content of his thought that Socrates' reputation rested: his attack upon the false gods of his contemporaries and his belief in a supreme deity and the salvation of the soul. Socrates, wrote Justin Martyr, "cast out from the state both Homer and the rest of the poets, and taught men to reject the wicked demons . . . and he exhorted them to become acquainted with the God who to them was unknown . . . [Christ] was partially known even by Socrates."³⁸

The third point is that Socrates was unique among the ancients because he had been declared – quite officially, by the foremost pagan oracle, that of Apollo at Delphi – to be the wisest man of all. No less significant than this supreme distinction itself was the fact that it was based upon an equally supreme paradox – for the oracle declared Socrates wisest because he had declared that all he knew was that he knew nothing. Hence, the crowning glory of pagan thought, by paganism's own testimony, lay in this confession of utter ignorance – on the part of the very thinker who most nearly approached knowledge of the true God. Again the

chief witness was Justin Martyr, who fully savored the irony of the argument: "For if Socrates, the wisest of your wise men, to whom even your oracle, as you yourselves say, bears witness, saying, 'Of all men, Socrates is the wisest' – if he confesses that he knows nothing, how did those who came after him profess to know even things heavenly? . . . Socrates, indeed, having uttered his last sentence in the Areopagus, departed to prison, ascribing to God alone the knowledge of those things which are hidden from us."³⁹

It is important to understand that Socrates was not universally or continually held in such high esteem. The positive attitude was closely linked to a positive view of the relationship between Christianity and the past generally, Judaic as well as pagan. It was first developed by the Early Christian apologists of the Greek East, who were steeped in the heritage of Greek philosophy and anxious to achieve a *modus vivendi* with it.⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen are particularly clear examples; they are at pains to draw the parallel between Socrates and Christ, since they regarded Christianity not primarily as the contradiction but as the fulfillment of pagan philosophy. Justin Martyr displays this special kind of ecumenism, in the context of religious succession, when he says that the Logos prevailed over the beliefs of the Greeks through Socrates just as it prevailed over those of the Jews through Christ himself.⁴¹

By contrast, signs of sympathy with Socrates were comparatively rare in the Latin West until the Renaissance, when the Christian humanists were inspired by much the same motive as the early Greek fathers. Marsilio Ficino was concerned to demonstrate the compatibility of Platonic thought not only with Christianity as such, but with the Judeo-Christian tradition as a whole. He makes this point explicitly in two little treatises written as companion pieces, in one of which he parallels Plato with Moses, in the other Socrates with Christ.⁴² Subsequently, Socrates came to be regarded with something approaching veneration, as witness Erasmus's famous dictum, "I can hardly restrain myself from saying, 'Saint Socrates, pray for us.'"⁴³ The

³⁶ "At si minus tibi placet & familiarem hominis ducem daemonem appellare saltem, ut placet nostris, bonum angelum appellato"; *In Apologiam Socratis Epitome*, in *Opera Omnia*, Basel, 1561, II, 1388. Cf. M. Wetzell, "Haben die Ankläger des Sokrates wirklich behauptet, dass er neue Gottheiten einführe?" *Jahres-Bericht über das Königliche Gymnasium zu Braunsberg. Programm No. 3*, Braunsberg, 1899, 13; Natali, *Socrate nel Giudizio*, 52. For Pico della Mirandola on Socrates' demon, see W. Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance. A Study in Intellectual Patterns*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972, 25.

³⁷ On the traditional parallel between Socrates and Christ, cf. Böhm, *Sokrates*, 136f.

³⁸ *Apology* II, 10; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., Grand Rapids, 1951–53, I, 191.

³⁹ *Hortatory address to the Greeks*, chap. 36 (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I, 288; the work is no longer thought to be by Justin); the idea is repeated by Eras-

mus, in the *Praise of Folly*: "Yet Socrates was not altogether foolish in this one respect, that he repudiated the epithet 'wise,' and gave it over to God" (ed. H. H. Hudson, Princeton, 1941, 31).

⁴⁰ Though by no means absolute, this basic distinction between the Eastern and Western views of Socrates is repeatedly stressed by writers on the subject; cf. Harnack, *Sokrates und die alte Kirche*, 17ff.; Geffcken, *Sokrates und das alte Christentum*, 25ff.; Natali, *Socrate nel giudizio*, 29ff.

⁴¹ "For not only among the Greeks did the Logos prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by the Logos Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ"; *Apology* I, 5; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I, 164.

⁴² *Concordantia Moysis et Platonis; Confirmatio Christianorum per Socratica* (*Opera*, I, 866ff.).

⁴³ "Vix mihi tempero, quin dicam, Sancte Sokrates, ora pro nobis"; *Colloquia*, ed. Amsterdam, 1662, 132.



23 Botticelli, *Madonna of the Magnificat*. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (photo: Alinari)

idea of a "Christian Socrates" became a veritable cliché; the epithet was applied, for example, to Montaigne, as well as to St. Philip Neri.⁴⁴

The three major attributes of the Christian Socrates – his divine inspiration, his foreknowledge of Christ, and his supremely wise ignorance were brought together toward the middle of the sixteenth century in a very influential illustrated emblem book, which must have been one of the

⁴⁴ Cf. Böhm, *Sokrates*, 12, 19.

Of those who have noted the resemblance to Sokrates, only W. Friedländer (*Caravaggio Studies*, 125) offered an explanation. Friedländer thought it might refer to St. Philip Neri (died 1595), who was described by contemporaries as a Christian Socrates. This coincidence helped to buttress Friedländer's basic interpretation of Caravaggio's development in Rome, that after the young painter came to the city he was influenced by the egalitarian reforms of the amiable churchman. Friedländer did not press the point; indeed, an allusion to Neri through a Socratic likeness in an evangelist portrait on the altarpiece of the French national church would be elliptical in the extreme. Moreover, there is nothing in the relevant texts to suggest a connection with Matthew, or to explain the crudeness and illiteracy of the figure.

Yet the analogy drawn between Neri and Socrates is important, because it shows both the degree and kind of esteem in which the ancient philosopher was held by the religious intelligentsia of the time. The comparison is a leitmotif in a Platonic dialogue written by one of Neri's followers, the theme of which is given by the title, "Philip, or On Christian Joy"; Neri is likened to Socrates not only on personal, moral and philosophical grounds, but also because of his method, his "amiable and decorous irony." In another work, Federico Borromeo said of Neri, "he was a great dissimulator . . . and he can be called the Christian Socrates because he wanted to appear anything but what he was." As we shall see, Caravaggio's picture also makes profound use of Socratic irony, and the accounts of Neri demonstrate the currency of the method.

Agostino Valiero, *Philippus sive de laetitia christiana*; edited, with Italian



24 *Beata Veronica da Binasco Composing Her Book of Devotions*, woodcut (from Isidorus de Insulis, *Gesta Beatae Veronice*, Milan, 1518, lxxiii)

important conceptual stimuli for Caravaggio's work. It was composed by the Bolognese antiquarian and historian Achille Bocchi and published in Bologna with engravings by Giulio Bonasoni; a second edition appeared in 1574, with the illustrations reworked by Agostino Carracci.⁴⁵

Several of Bocchi's emblems include Socrates, of which two are especially important. The first expresses the very idea of conveying an underlying meaning through images:

translation by C. Cavattoni, Verona, 1862; references to Socrates occur on pages 4, 9, 11 ("O senex optime, o pater, o noster Socrates amabili illa tua decoris plena ironia uti non desines?"), 18. Cf. L. Ponnell and L. Bordet, *St. Philip Neri and the Roman Society of his Times (1515-1595)*, London, 1932, 21, 500f.; G. Incisa della Rocchetta et al., *Il primo processo per San Filippo Neri*, 4 vols. (*Studi e testi*, 191, 196, 205, 224), Vatican City, 1957-63, II, 84f., n. 1168; also IV, 423, index s.v. "Valiero").

Borromeo's remarks are quoted in A. Saba, *Federico Borromeo e i mistici del suo tempo*, Florence, 1933, 265f.: "Idem Pontifex [Leo XI] dicere solitus fuit, Patrem Philippum videri sibi profundae prudentiae hominem, atque in eo prudentiam ipse quoque suam declarabat, cum mentem admiraretur eam, quam imprudentes homines minime agnoscebant. Fuit enim dissimulator ille magnus, sicuti postea demonstrabitur, ac Socrates quodammodo Christianus appellari potuit, quatenus scilicet videri volebat quidvis potuis, quam id quod ipse erat, hominumque, iudicia circa omnem de se existimationem fallere conabatur, quod ipsum variis modis faciebat; sancte tamen et innocenter, et instinctu, sicuti credere licet, divino" (italics mine).

⁴⁵ *Achillis Bocchi Bonon. symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere quas serio ludebat libri quinque*. I have used the 1574 edition.

On Bocchi, see the entry by A. Rotondò, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Rome, 1960ff., XI, 67-70; his palace in Bologna, designed by Vignola, has been studied by J. K. Schmidt, "Zu Vignolas Palazzo Bocchi in Bologna," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* XIII, 1967-68, 83-94.

Socrates is shown seated before a canvas on which he draws a head that adumbrates a faintly perceptible alter ego (Fig. 21).⁴⁶ Socrates is guided by a winged figure, and below are inscribed the words “daimon” and “eudaimon,” an allusion to the theory mentioned by Apuleius and St. Augustine that the blessed are called *eudaimones* in Greek because they are good demons.⁴⁷

The emblematic method is epitomized in the punning caption: “In the painting of weighty matters the burdens of things are shown, and through it those which are most hidden are most revealed.” Hence the significance of the illustration becomes clear – the blessed Socrates is inspired by his guardian spirit to paint a picture that bears an underlying idea.

The second of Bocchi’s Socratic emblems pertinent here shows a bearded old man kneeling and holding on his shoulders a globe marked with the signs of universal dominion; a banderole floats above inscribed, “He who seeks the highest must hold all!” (Fig. 22). At the top is a bearded figure with the triangular halo signifying the Trinity.⁴⁸ In this case it is the caption of the illustration that alludes to Socrates: “He holds the highest good who knows that he knows nothing.” Bocchi’s emblem thus expresses the ultimate irony, that paganism’s greatest claim to wisdom, to know that one knows nothing, is tantamount to grasping the highest Christian mystery. In Socrates’ knowledge of his own ignorance lay his foreknowledge of the Trinity.

Taken together, Bocchi’s emblems provide the key to most of the Socratic content of Caravaggio’s altarpiece: a picture with an underlying meaning, which consists in the divine revelation of truth to him who is aware that he does not understand. I suspect that Bocchi’s volume was relevant not only for its content, but also for its method, which is evident from the title: *Five Books by Achille Bocchi of Symbolic Questions Universal in Nature which he Treats Seriously in Jest (quas serio ludebat)* – that is, he follows the heuristic tradition formulated in antiquity of conveying profound ideas through irony.⁴⁹ The most famous practitioner was of course Socrates himself, whose wise profession of ignorance remains a byword, Socratic irony, even today. Caravaggio’s picture is filled with this kind of irony – a coarse-looking evangelist writing in Hebrew, a Jewish Christian shown as a pagan, a tax collector-author-philosopher who does not know how to write.

This last paradox, the writer’s illiteracy, conveyed the underlying message of divinely dispelled ignorance in the context of an evangelist portrait. It, too, is explained by Socratic tradition, not the least remarkable aspect of which is that Socrates himself wrote nothing. All we know of him, or think we know of him, we know from the

accounts of others. The very form of the philosophical dialogue, which is so inextricably associated with Socrates, reflects the purely oral nature of his teaching (another way, incidentally, in which he was paralleled to Christ). This literary silence was legendary even in antiquity; perhaps to explain it, but in any case consistent with the proletarian picture of him painted by the sources generally, there was, strange as it may seem, an explicit tradition that Socrates was actually illiterate. This scandalous idea was recorded in the most famous and authoritative source on the ancient philosophers, Porphyry’s *Lives of the Philosophers*. Porphyry’s book is lost, but parts of it were preserved in quotations by later writers. It happens that Porphyry’s statement concerning Socrates’ illiteracy was quoted, following a discussion of his manual labor as a stone-cutter, by one and only one early author, Theodoretus of Cyrillus, who was one of the most important of the early Greek Christian apologists. The passage, in Theodoretus’ treatise *On the Maladies of the Ancient Philosophers*, reads as follows: “Porphyry explicitly states [that Socrates] did not lack natural endowment, but was more or less completely uneducated. He was practically illiterate and made himself conspicuous by stammering like a child when called on to read or write.” Porphyry went on, according to Theodoretus, to point up the irony of this fact: “Yet this uneducated, unlearned man was more worthy of respect than all the others.”⁵⁰

No less significant for us than the statement itself is the context in which Theodoretus cites it. The whole thrust of his argument, which is the opening chapter of his treatise, is that the Hellenophiles should not reject the gospel because it comes from an uncultivated source, since among the thinkers they themselves value most is Socrates, who was ignorant.

The Theodoretus passage, which I repeat is unique, is also significant because it provides an insight into Caravaggio’s source. For Theodoretus’ treatise was first published in Greek, along with a Latin translation, by the German humanist Friedrich Sylburg at Heidelberg in 1592.⁵¹ A year later, Sylburg also published for the first time a Greek and Latin text of the works of Justin Martyr, which we have seen contained other material of fundamental importance for the apologetic view of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism and paganism.⁵² We can even suggest the point of dissemination of these ideas in Rome, in the person of Fulvio Orsini who, we remember, also collected the visual material concerning Socrates. Orsini, we know, was particularly interested in Theodoretus; a manuscript of the *Treatise on the Maladies of the Greeks* with annotations in Orsini’s hand is still preserved in the Vatican Library,⁵³ and we have a letter from Sylburg to Orsini thanking him

⁴⁶ *Symbolicarum quaestionum*, vi.

⁴⁷ Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, xv; Augustine, *The City of God*, ix, 11.

⁴⁸ *Symbolicarum quaestionum*, cccvii.

⁴⁹ On the tradition, cf. E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, New York, 1968, 236ff.; with special reference to England, N. Knox, *The Word Irony and its Context, 1500–1755*, Durham, N.C., 1961, esp. 5ff.

⁵⁰ *Curatio graecarum affectionum*, 1, 29, 31; trans. Ferguson, *Socrates* (cited in note 34 above), 315. P. Canivet, ed., *Théodoret de Cyr. Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques*, 2 vols., Paris, 1958; *idem, Histoire d’une entreprise apologetique au V^e siècle*, Paris, 1957.

Socrates’ literacy naturally became an issue in discussions of the so-called Socratic Letters, now regarded as spurious (e.g., L. Allacci *Socratis, Antisthenis et aliorum socraticorum epistolae*, Paris, 1637, 76–133).

⁵¹ Cf. Canivet, *Théodoret*, 1, 71. A Latin translation, without the Greek text, had been published in 1519.

⁵² New York University has a copy in which the two publications are bound together.

⁵³ *Vaticanus Ottobonianus 38 saec. XVI*; cf. Canivet, *Théodoret*, 1, 72, n.1. Sylburg mentions Orsini in the preface, page 1.



25 Rubens, *Triumph of the Church over Ignorance and Blindness*. Madrid, Museo del Prado (photo: Anderson)

for sending his comments on the text.⁵⁴ We know from one of his own letters that Orsini had also been an intimate friend of Mathieu Cointrel, the original founder of the chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi.⁵⁵

What Caravaggio did was to fuse, Ingmar Bergman-like, two distinct yet kindred spirits – Levi the Jew who recognized Christ, and Socrates the wise pagan who recognized his own ignorance; but the whole is more than the sum of the parts, for out of the fusion emerged a third *persona*, the evangelist Matthew. The additional ingredient is the gospel, the word of God brought by the angel. The angel's act of guiding the writer's hand provides the magic touch, transmuting Judaism and paganism into Christianity.

The Guiding Hand

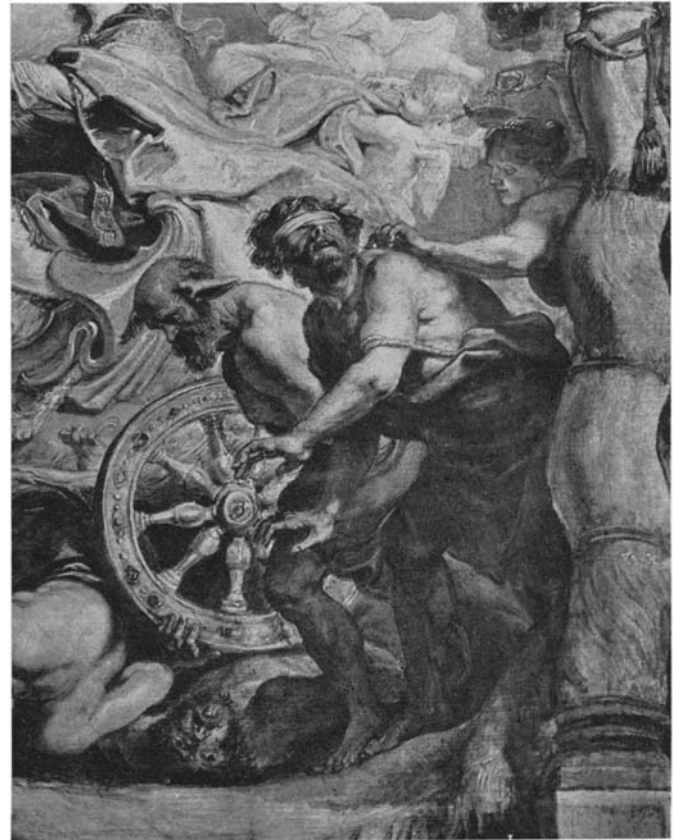
There were two basic traditions involving what might be called the act of manual assistance in writing. One was pedagogical, concerned simply with instruction in the art. The other was inspirational, and served to illustrate the divine origin of the text transcribed. The pedagogical tradition occurs in various descriptions of teaching methods by classical authors.⁵⁶ A passage in Quintilian suggests that

⁵⁴ De Nolhac, *La bibliothèque* (cited in note 28 above), 64, 443. In the same letter Sylburg mentions that the edition of Justin Martyr is nearly ready.

⁵⁵ De Nolhac, *La bibliothèque*, 98.

⁵⁶ Cf. H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, 6th ed., Paris, 1965, 236, 396; *idem*, *Mousikos Aner*, 27–45.

J. Bialostocki (*Theoria i Tworczosc*, Poznam, 1961, 12, fig. 2) has referred the motif in Caravaggio's picture to an allegorical print by Hendrik Goltzius, in which a seated male figure labeled "Usus" writes on a tablet, while a nude winged female personification of "Ars" seated on a globe behind him, helps to hold the tablet with one hand and points toward it with the other.



26 Detail of Figure 25



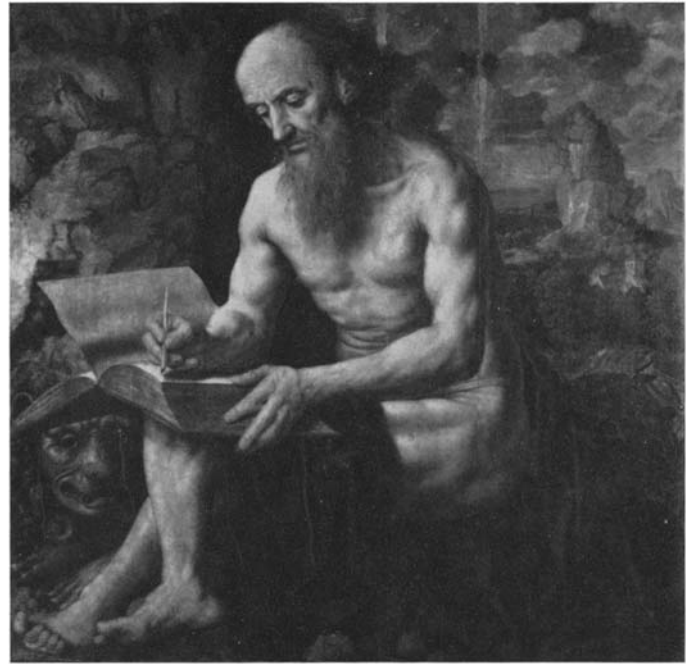
27 Caravaggio, *St. Matthew Composing His Gospel*, second version. Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi (photo: Alinari)



28 Mario Cartaro, after Pino da Siena, *Annunciation*, engraving

hand-guiding had been rendered obsolete by the grooved tablet: "Further by increasing the frequency and speed with which they follow these fixed outlines we shall give steadfastness to the fingers, and there will be no need to guide the child's hand with our own."⁵⁷ Jerome offers the methods as alternatives: "When she begins with uncertain hand to use the pen, either let another hand be put over hers to guide her baby fingers, or else have the letters marked on the tablet so that her writing may follow their outlines and keep to their limits without straying away."⁵⁸ Seneca uses the hand-guiding method as a metaphor for moral guidance given to the neophyte soul: "The soul should accordingly be guided at the very moment when it is becoming able to guide itself. Boys study according to direction. Their fingers are held and guided by others so that they may follow the outlines of the letters; next they are ordered to imitate a copy and base thereon a style of penmanship."⁵⁹

The second, inspirational conception of the hand-guiding motif occurs in the famous tondo of the Magnificat by Botticelli, which Maurice Vloberg showed to be a variant of the common theme of the Virgin and Christchild who write



29 Jan van Hemessen, *St. Jerome in the Desert*. Hampton Court Palace



30 Hans Sebald Beham, *St. Jerome and the Angel*, engraving

⁵⁷ *Inst. Orat.*, I, 1, 27 (Leob Classical Library ed., I, 35).

⁵⁸ Letter 107, 4, 3, (Loeb ed., 347).

⁵⁹ *Ad Lucilium* 94, 51 (Loeb ed., III, 45).

the names of the saved in the Book of Life (Fig. 23).⁶⁰ Botticelli's picture anticipates Caravaggio in several respects. The normal relationship between adult teacher and youthful pupil is reversed. Moreover, the motivation for the action is analogous. The Madonna, inspired by her son, transcribes the Magnificat, and the gift of composing sacred scripture is bestowed upon her by the Holy Ghost.⁶¹ Finally, the texts involved carry essentially the same message as in Caravaggio. In fact, only the right-hand page is from the Magnificat – the hymn of thanksgiving quoted in the first chapter of Luke, offered by the Virgin after the Annunciation, when she visited Elizabeth and received from her and from John the Baptist in her womb the first acknowledgement of her divine motherhood. Mary refers to the salvation of the future generations that will venerate her child. The passage on the left page comes later in the chapter; it is from the Benedictus, the prophecy of John's father, Zacharias, who refers to Christ as the fulfillment of the promise the Lord made to Abraham. The picture thus identifies the gospel as the divinely inspired, written record of the Incarnation linking the past to the future.⁶²

Whether consciously or not Caravaggio combined these two conceptions of the hand-guiding motif, the pedagogical and the inspirational. There was only one real precedent for his interpretation, and a precedent he must surely have known. It occurs in the illustrated biography of one of Caravaggio's Lombard compatriots, the Blessed Veronica Negroni, who was born in the little town of Binasco near Milan, not far from Caravaggio's birthplace.⁶³ This poor and utterly uneducated woman, after strenuous efforts, was accepted in the famous Augustinian convent of Santa Marta in Milan, where she died in 1496. She was famous for the numerous ecstasies and visions she experienced under the guidance of her guardian angel, by whose radiance, as she reported, she was able to read the divine office on the darkest night without light or glasses. Veronica was completely illiterate, but with the angel's help she was able to

read and recite the entire office and psalms, and she even wrote a book of devotions under his dictation.⁶⁴ The book itself was lost, but the golden pen the angel had brought was preserved and venerated by her conventual sisters. A Latin biography of Veronica was published in 1518 with a splendid series of woodcuts and an Italian version of the text appeared in 1581.⁶⁵ One of the woodcuts shows Veronica seated with the angel kneeling beside her; he reaches across with his right hand and grasps her right wrist to guide as she writes in the book on her knees (Fig. 24). This touching image, recollected no doubt along with Ambrogio Figino's *Matthew* from his youth in Milan, must have been the starting point for Caravaggio's sublime disquisition on the nature and efficacy of the faith.

What Rome contributed was the grandeur of the final conception, in which an old man arduously learning from a patient child represented the very process by which Judaism and paganism were superseded by Christianity. For stated in these terms the first *St. Matthew* embodied one of the oldest and most fundamental teachings of the Roman church. Focusing on the unique character of the gospel of Matthew – the first Christian document of God's word, which announces that in Christ the Word is made flesh to replace the old by the new – Caravaggio created a modern equivalent of those vast, triumphant decorations of the Early Christian basilicas in Rome, where Christianity is paid homage by representatives of the Churches of the Jews and the Gentiles, the *ecclesiae ex circumcisione* and *ex gentibus*.⁶⁶ The idea was never lost in the intervening centuries, but it enjoyed a great revival in the period of the Counter-Reformation, in a variety of themes celebrating the Triumph of the Church.⁶⁷ I will illustrate one of them, by Peter Paul Rubens, an artist on whom Rome had a similar effect, and who studied Caravaggio's works carefully. I refer to Rubens's sketch in the Prado for one of the series of Eucharistic tapestries, which is usually entitled *Triumph of the Church over Ignorance and Blindness* (Figs. 25, 26).⁶⁸ The

⁶⁰ Cf. *La Vierge Notre Médiatrice*, Grenoble, 1938, 151–72, esp. 169f.

⁶¹ For a discussion of the Virgin's authorship of the Magnificat, and her divine gift, see R. Benzoni, *Commentariorum, disputationum in beatissimae Virginis canticum Magnificat libri quinque . . .*, Venice, 1606, Bk. I, chap. XI ("An Deipara aliquid scripserit"), chap. II ("An Beata Virgo habuerit, quando cepit Magnificat, donum condendi Sacram Scripturam"), 75–80.

⁶² Luke I, 72–79, 46–49; the inscriptions are transcribed in H. P. Horne, *Sandro Botticelli*, London, 1908, 121. A. van Buren in a forthcoming paper, "Raphael's Madonna at None: Iconography and Form in the Evolution of a Work of Art," notes that the Benedictus and Magnificat are sung respectively at Lauds and Vespers. This liturgical use, in which the sequence is that of promise and fulfillment, explains Botticelli's reversal of the order of their appearance in the gospel.

⁶³ On Beata Veronica da Binasco, cf. *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, 12 vols. plus index, Rome, 1961–70, XII, 1050; *Enciclopedia cattolica*, 12 vols., Florence, 1948–54, VIII, 1735.

⁶⁴ I quote the relevant chapter from Isidoro degli Isolani (cited in the following note): "Compositus Veronica opus praeclarissimum Angelo dictante quod diuina ira ab mortalium oculis creditur ablatum Virgine adhuc uiuente. Futurum uero affirmavit: ut coenobio Divae Marthae uolument ipsum prouidentissimum Dei munere aliquando restitueretur. Quod utinam nostra detur tempestate: quae angelicis dogmatibus procul dubio mirūque in modū eget. Verū aureo calamo Angelo afferente accepto praeafatum librum Veronica conscripsit: quē iuxta palmulā sorores coenobii Divae Marthae peculiaria ueneratione custodiunt. Vidimus nosipsi calamum: angelica ministeria Veronicæque sanctitudinem ed in re magis magisque demirati"; fol. xxxix, v.

⁶⁵ Isidorus de Insulis, *Inexplicabilis mysterii gesta Beatae Veronicae Virginis praeclarissimi monasterii Sanctae Marthae mediolani sub observatione regulae Diui Augustini*, Milan, 1518; *La santissima, e miracolosa vita della Beata Veronica . . .*, Brescia, 1581, cf. page 64.

On the woodcuts, cf. P. Kristeller, *Die lombardische Graphik der Renaissance*, Berlin, 1913, 23, 56, 58, 125.

⁶⁶ The significance of *Matthew* in this sense perhaps motivated the introduction, evidently in a later restoration, of the opening words of the gospel on the book held by St. Paul in the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana (cf. W. Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome from the Third to the Fourteenth Centuries*, London, 1967, 66).

⁶⁷ See the pioneering discussion of these themes in E. Mâle, *L'art religieux après le Concile de Trente*, Paris, 1932, 19ff.

⁶⁸ On the series as a whole, cf. V. H. Elbern, "Die Rubensteppiche des Kölner Domes. Ihre Geschichte und ihre Stellung zum Zyklus 'Triumph der Eucharistie,'" *Kölner Domblatt. Jahrbuch des Zentral-Dombauvereins*, x, 1955, 43–88, cf. 84f.; J. S. Held, "Rubens' Triumph of the Eucharist and the Modello in Louisville," *Bulletin of the J. B. Speed Art Museum*, xxvi, No. 3, February, 1968, 2–22.

A Socrates figure also appears among the defeated personifications in the *Triumph of Truth* (Elbern, "Rubensteppiche," 82).

For a sketch by Rubens after an ancient Socrates figure cf. A. Mongan, ed., *Drawings and Oil Sketches by P. P. Rubens from American Collections*, exh. cat., Fogg Art Museum and Pierpont Morgan Library, Cambridge and New York, 1956, 13, No. 5; J. S. Held, *Rubens, Selected Drawings*, 2 vols., London, 1959, I, 156ff., No. 160; W. Stechow, *Rubens and the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, 32f.

personification of the Church rides in her chariot holding the sacrament aloft, while two defeated prisoners stumble along at the rear. One of these is a dark, Semitic-looking individual, who gazes heavenward but wears a blindfold, the age-old symbol of the unseeing Synagogue. Beside him is the representative of paganism, none other than Socrates, looking earthward and wearing ass's ears to display his stupidity. Rubens, too, took Socrates at his word, though in a different way, and alluded to another and not so flattering epithet that had been applied to the father of ancient philosophy by one of his later antagonists, the Epicurean Zeno, who called him *scurrus atticus*, the fool of Athens.⁶⁹ Above these two figures flies a female personification carrying the lamp of truth, whose light the one ignores and the other cannot see.⁷⁰

The Second *St. Matthew*

Baglione reports simply that the first *St. Matthew* "pleased no one"; Bellori elaborates: the priests of San Luigi removed the picture "saying that the figure had neither decorum nor the aspect of a saint, being seated with his legs crossed and his feet crudely exposed to the public."⁷¹ If this last was indeed an objection, Caravaggio must have been not a little amused, for we have seen that the cross-legged pose belonged to a long and hallowed tradition of author portraiture.

Nevertheless, in the final version (Fig. 27) the apparent solecisms in the first work are also eliminated: Matthew is now the same person as in the lateral scenes, his appearance is eminently distinguished, and he is literate. The picture has, in fact, been regarded largely as a concession to the conventional demands of the officials of the church for which it was destined. But in truth it is no less extraordinary than the first version, and I rather suspect that Caravaggio regarded the criticisms as an opportunity to convey another, altogether opposite and complementary aspect of essentially the same message.

In the second *St. Matthew* Caravaggio defied virtually the whole Renaissance tradition of evangelist portraiture, adopting instead the old medieval method of showing the angel as a spectacular apparition emerging from heaven at a distance above and behind (cf. Fig. 5). This return to an overtly mystical formula was not made without fundamental

changes, however. Normally evangelists composed their gospels in a seated position, whereas Caravaggio shows Matthew half-kneeling as if rushing to the table and dipping his pen in an excited effort to get the angel's words into writing. For this arrangement Caravaggio turned to an entirely different prototype, but the one most clearly linked to the theme he wished to convey. The theme he turned to was the Incarnation itself, that is, the Annunciation to the Virgin. The second *St. Matthew*, in fact, relates to a common class of depictions of the appearance of Gabriel to the Virgin that might be called "back-handed" Annunciations. Mary is shown as if interrupted in her devotions by the angel who appears behind her, sometimes in full-flight. There are many variants of the type, and on occasion the Virgin may be shown half-kneeling, as in a composition engraved in 1571 by Mario Cartaro (Fig. 28).⁷² This reference to the Annunciation made the incarnational message of Matthew's gospel explicit, and obviated the need to include the text itself.

But what of the matter of autograph authenticity that figured so importantly in the first version? It will be recalled that the prime witness to the tradition that Matthew wrote his gospel in his own hand was St. Jerome, who referred to an actual manuscript. For this reason, as well as for establishing the primacy of the first gospel, Jerome was constantly and intimately associated with Matthew. The two are commonly paired when the evangelists and the fathers of the Church are linked,⁷³ and sometimes, indeed, Matthew and Jerome are virtually indistinguishable. In a painting of 1545 by Jan van Hemessen, Jerome is shown seated in the desert with legs crossed writing in a book he holds on his knees (Fig. 29).⁷⁴ In an engraving of 1521 by Hans Sebald Beham, Jerome is again seated with legs crossed, in animated conversation with an angel (Fig. 30)⁷⁵ – for all the world like the *St. Matthews* discussed earlier, including Caravaggio's own.

It happens that the back-handed Annunciation formula had a considerable following in Venice; Veronese, for example, used it no less than three times.⁷⁶ Important in our present context is that it was adopted by Tintoretto for an altarpiece with an analogous theme of divine revelation involving St. Jerome. The Virgin is shown appearing with a group of flying angels to convey to the hermit the truth of

⁶⁹ Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 34, 93. The epithet was specifically linked to Socrates' profession of ignorance by the Early Christian writer Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 38, 5.

⁷⁰ The downward glance of the Socrates figure seems to reflect the famous statement of Cicero that Socrates was "the first to call philosophy down from the heavens . . ." (*Tuscul. disp.*, 5, 4, 10) and the upward glance of the blind figure the traditional association of Jewish thought with things divine.

We may note here some further reflections of Caravaggio's ideas in the first *St. Matthew*. The autograph authenticity of the gospel is emphasized in a painting of the evangelist by Guercino in the Pinacoteca Capitolina, Rome; the angel points to the words inscribed on the book: EGO MATTHEVS EVANGA EVANGELIVM HOC SCRIPSI (cf. D. Mahon, *Mostra del Guercino a Bologna*, Bologna, 1968, 121, No. 50). A text is inscribed in Hebrew on the book held by Matthew in the sculpture by Giuseppe Rusnati (1693) in the Certosa of Pavia (cf. M. G. Albertini Ottolenghi et al., *La Certosa di Pavia*, Milan, 1968, 71, nn. 87, 88).

⁷¹ Quoted in Friedländer, *Caravaggio Studies*, 232, 240.

⁷² Bartsch, xv, 521.1 (after a design by Pino da Siena). Also close to Caravaggio's composition, as Mrs. Sarah Wilk kindly reminded me, is the *Annunciation* designed by Michelangelo and executed by Marcello Venusti, then visible in the church of Santa Maria della Pace (cf. J. Wilde, "'Cartonetti' by Michelangelo," *Burlington Magazine*, CI, 1959, 337); the Virgin is shown seated, however. This formula for the Annunciation seems to echo the seated evangelist type referred to earlier (fig. 5 and the end of note 4 above).

⁷³ I cite, as one among many examples, Correggio's pendentive in San Giovanni Evangelista, Parma (1520–24); A. G. Quintavalle, *Gli affreschi del Correggio in San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma*, Milan, 1962, pls. 32, 35.

⁷⁴ At Hampton Court; cf. L. Cust, *Notes on the Pictures in the Royal Collections*, London, 1911, 41ff.

⁷⁵ Bartsch, VIII, 80, 63.

⁷⁶ B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance. Venetian School*, 2 vols., London, 1957, II, pls. 1067, 1077; S. M. Marconi, *Gallerie dell'accademia di Venezia. Opere d'arte del secolo XVI*, Rome, 1962, 91f., No. 144.



32 Guido Reni, *St. Jerome and the Angel*. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



31 Tintoretto, *The Virgin Appearing to St. Jerome*. Venice, Accademia
(photo: Rossi, Venice)

her Assumption (Fig. 31).⁷⁷ Caravaggio's reference to Tintoretto's composition is patent; he must have known it from a famous engraving made by Agostino Carracci in 1588.⁷⁸ Striking confirmation of the Hieronymian ingredient in the second *St. Matthew* is the fact that the reaction was reversible, so to speak: Caravaggio's composition in turn became the model for a painting by Guido Reni of St. Jerome with the angel (Fig. 32).⁷⁹ It seems evident that the second version of the altarpiece was again a fusion, this time between the Incarnation itself and the chief witness to the authenticity of the written account.

And what, finally, of the genealogy, which was the key to Christ's historical role and his manhood? Again, it is the angel who makes the crucial point, and again quite literally so, since with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand he ticks off the number on the index finger of his left hand. This is not an idle gesture, but carries a very specific meaning. Even today in Italy when one counts on one's fingers, one starts with the thumb. So Caravaggio's angel is making point number two – which is exactly the point to which the writing had proceeded in the first version: the genealogy had been announced in the first verse, and the first name had been named in the second, "Abraham begat . . ."

In more general terms Caravaggio was adapting a visual rhetorical device that had often been used in scenes of disputation or instruction.⁸⁰ The discussant counts on his fingers as if ticking off the points in his argument. Caravaggio adapted the motif from a source he had already used in the first version, Raphael's *School of Athens* (cf. Fig. 13). There, as if to emphasize the purely oral nature of Socrates' teaching, Raphael had shown the father of pagan philosophy and the wisest man of antiquity counting on his fingers in a similar way. Hence even the Socratic element in the first version was preserved in the second.

And along with the Socratic method so also the Socratic irony. In the first version the divine word was conveyed mechanically through a laborious and earthbound process of physical instruction to a humble proletarian whose chief virtue lay in his knowledge of his own ignorance. In the second version it is conveyed miraculously to a stunned intellectual through a heaven-sent process of strictly rational analysis and exposition. Again, the key to the irony lies in the divine mystery itself, which brings truth to him who is wise, be he ignorant or learned.

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⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 240, No. 414.

N. Ivanoff connected the painting with Jerome's treatise on the virginity of Mary ("Il ciclo pittorico della Scuola di San Fantin," in *Ateneo Veneto* [fascicolo speciale per il 150° anniversario, 1812–1962], Venice, 1962, 65f.; cf. D. Rosand, "Palma Giovane in the Scuola di S. Maria della Giustizia," *Master Drawings*, vi, 1968, 26, n.3). More likely, however, it refers to a famous letter discussing the Assumption of the Virgin, falsely attributed to Jerome in the Middle Ages; passages from the letter were used as lessons in the office until the reform of the breviary in 1568 (cf. M. Jugie, *La mort e l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge. Étude historico-doctrinale* [*Studi e Testi*, 114], Vatican City, 1944, 277ff. 424f., and *passim*). Tintoretto's altarpiece is generally dated 1570–76. The ceiling painting in the same room, by Palma Giovane, represented the Assumption of the Virgin, and included Jerome prominently.

⁷⁸ Bartsch, xviii, 44. 76; cf. M. Calvesi and V. Casale, *Le incisioni dei Carracci*, Rome, 1965, 38, No. 125.

⁷⁹ Now in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum; cf. C. Gnudi and G. C. Cavalli, *Guido Reni*, Florence, 1955, 97, No. 104. On this and a related version in Detroit, cf. D. S. Pepper, "The Angel Appearing to Saint Jerome by Guido Reni, A New Acquisition," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, XLVIII, 1969, 28–35; Pepper, 32, n.2, relates the painting to Caravaggio, but curiously refers to the first rather than the second *St. Matthew*. Reni also used the finger-counting motif for the angel with St. Matthew (Vatican, Pinacoteca; Gnudi and Cavalli, *Reni*, 97, No. 105).

⁸⁰ O. Chomentovskaja, "Le comput digital: histoire d'un geste dans l'art de la Renaissance italienne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, xx, 1938, Pt. 2, 157ff.; M. Aronberg Lavin, "The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino: Paolo Uccello, Joos van Ghent, Piero della Francesca," *The Art Bulletin*, XLIX, 1967, 17, n. 103. Cf. generally T. Klauser, ed., *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Stuttgart, 1950ff., vii, cols. 909–46, s.v. "Finger."