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Hell in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*

Among the problems which have confronted scholars dealing with the interpretation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*[1] is the physical positioning and symbolic role played by Hell in the fresco. It seems curious that the "Cave of Hell" should be situated directly over the altar in the Sistine chapel while, at the same time, condemned figures are clearly being propelled towards "Hell" proper which seems to exist "off-stage" to the viewer's right, Christ's sinister [Fig. 1].

According to iconographic tradition, Hell was most frequently depicted at the lower edge of the *Last Judgment* scene. This corresponded with the cosmological view of the universe in broad terms, namely the common concept of Ascent to Heaven and Descent to Hell in a "flat-earth" system, which is alluded to in numerous places in the Scriptures. The iconography of the *Last Judgment* was linked with the idea of a fixed hierarchy in the cosmos, demonstrated by the use of a layered horizontal composition, organized into ascending and descending tiers.[2] This format is seen in the earliest surviving examples, such as the sixth-century manuscript of Cosmas Indicopleustes [Fig. 2], and the practice was also followed in many examples of the medieval and Renaissance period. A Bolognese panel of the fourteenth century demonstrates the typical arrangement, with Satan in Hell in the center of the lowest register [see Fig. 3].[3]

As a further link between this scene and cosmological symbolism, the actual positioning of the *Last Judgment* within the framework of a church or chapel was also significant. While most churches possessed an East-West orientation, with the altar in the East, there had long been a traditional tendency for the *Last Judgment* to be positioned on the interior of the west wall of a church, because of the association between the Last Judgment, or the end of the world, and the setting of the sun in the west. In this position, the subject also served as a disciplinary reminder to the congregation on exit, as for example at Torcello and Padua [Figs. 4 and 5].[4] In northern Europe, especially in examples of medieval French portal sculpture, versions of the *Last Judgment* were similarly often placed in the west, but on the external tympanum, here to be lit by the setting sun. Hell was, again, frequently positioned across the low-

1) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», 1536-41, fresco (13.7 x 12.2m), Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Rome. Photo: Vatican Museums.

Cosmas Indicopleustes, «Last Judgment», detail from *Christian Topography* (Vat. Gr. 699) sixth century, Vatican Library, Rome. Photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

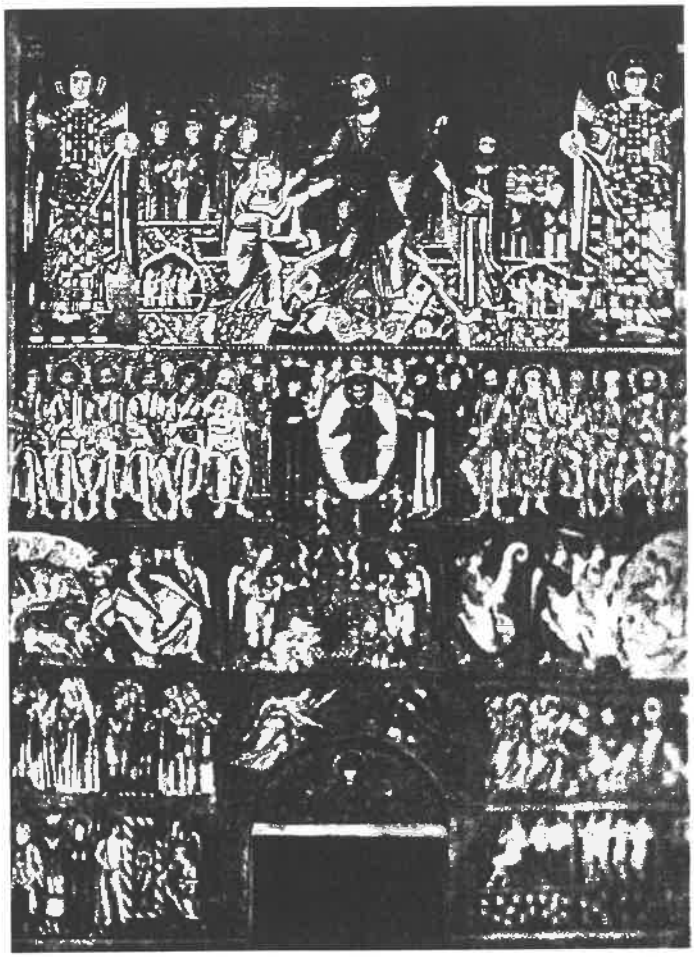
3) Unknown Bolognese artist, «Last Judgment», 14th century, panel, Pinacoteca, Bologna. Photo: Archivio Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.

est register [for example, Fig. 6].[5] The opposing orientation of the altar to the east, towards the sun-rise, also had significant, but contrasting, symbolic meaning. If the *Last Judgment* in the west was to signify the end, then the altar in the east naturally signified the new beginning, life and salvation through Christ's sacrifice.[6]

The gradual displacement of Hell from its usual position at the center of the lower edge of scenes of the *Last Judgment* towards the viewer's right became increasingly marked, especially in medieval Italy. This appears to be related to the custom of separating the saved and the damned on Christ's right and left hand respectively, according to Matthew 25:33-34. The arrangement is particularly noticeable at Torcello and Padua [Figs. 4 and 5] and also at Florence in the Baptistery dome. During the Renaissance, this tendency appears also to have been reinforced in examples of the *Last Judgment*, due partly, it seems, to a change in its usual position. At this time, it became more frequently depicted upon portable altarpieces as opposed to fresco or mosaic. Portable altarpieces of the *Last Judgment* might thus no longer possess a western orientation, but would normally be situated at or on the east wall or altar. Altarpieces of this type, exemplified by the series by Fra Angelico in Italy [Fig. 7] or Rogier van der Weyden in northern Europe,[7] almost invariably see Hell removed to the viewer's right (i.e. Christ's sinister), in order, it seems specifically to avoid the awkward and undesirable location of Hell directly over the altar.

In this context, Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* poses a special problem since, owing to the reverse orientation of the Sistine Chapel,[8] it is simultaneously situated on the west wall of the chapel as well as the altar wall, a unique position for a *Last Judgment* fresco. In addition, as has already been mentioned, the figures of the damned are clearly being propelled by Charon in his barque toward Hell in the lower right hand corner where Minos marks the way; yet a "Cave of Hell" is also, strangely, depicted in the center of the lower edge of the fresco, directly over the altar itself. Here, as in Michelangelo's time, it normally lies partially hidden behind the altar cross and six massive candlesticks [Fig. 8].

In neither Michelangelo's central cave, nor in the scene at bottom right do the torture scenes common in medieval depictions of Hell occur. Vivid portrayals of red hot tongs and cauldrons of boiling oil, popular in earlier versions of the subject are clearly avoided by Michelangelo. A figure representing Avarice appears weighed down by his money bags and the key to his treasure [Fig. 9][9] but the facial and bodily expressions of Michelangelo's portrayal of condemned figures are clearly more subtle interpretations than the typical scenes of torture relished by

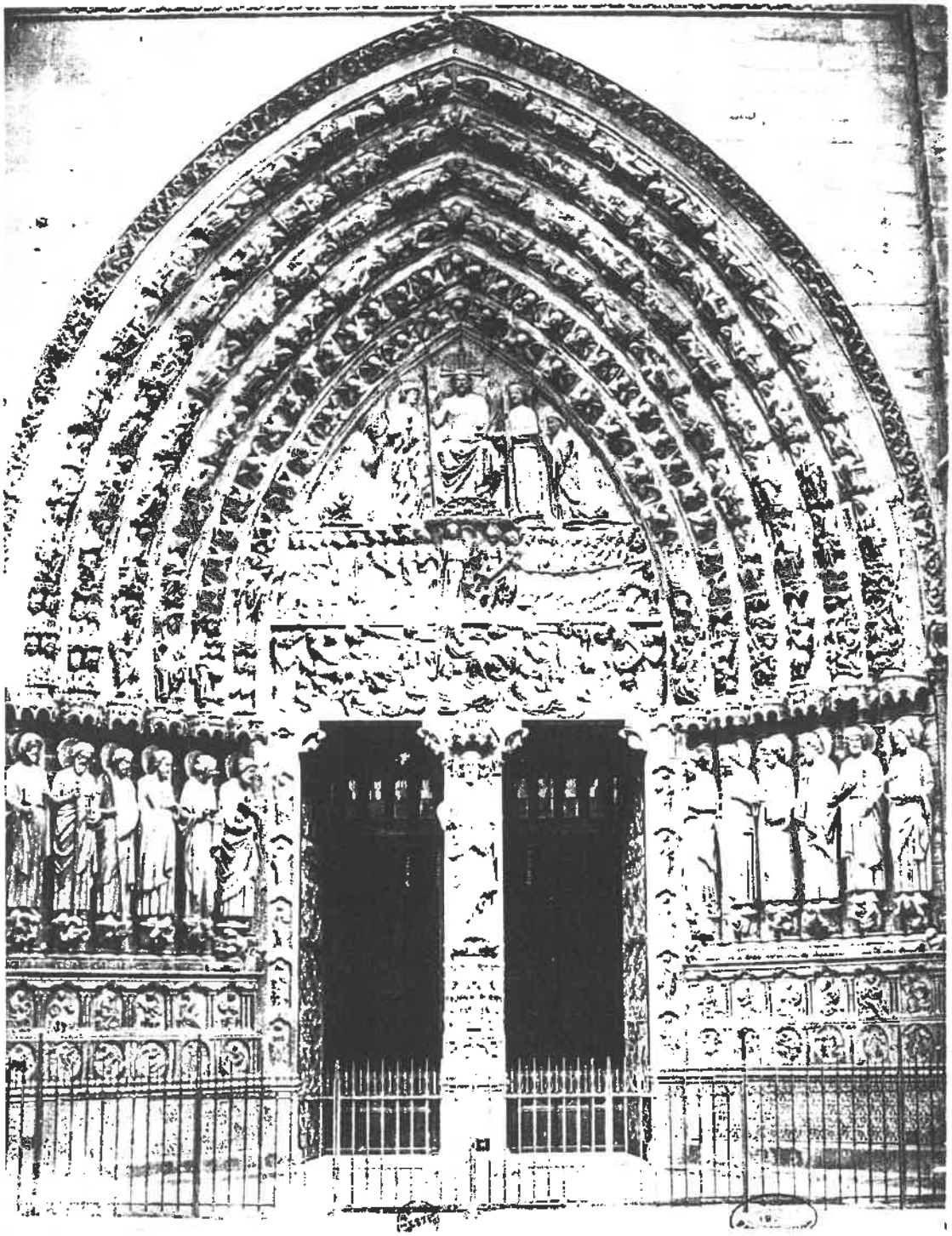


4) «Last Judgment», 12th century, mosaic, Sta Maria Assunta, Torcello.

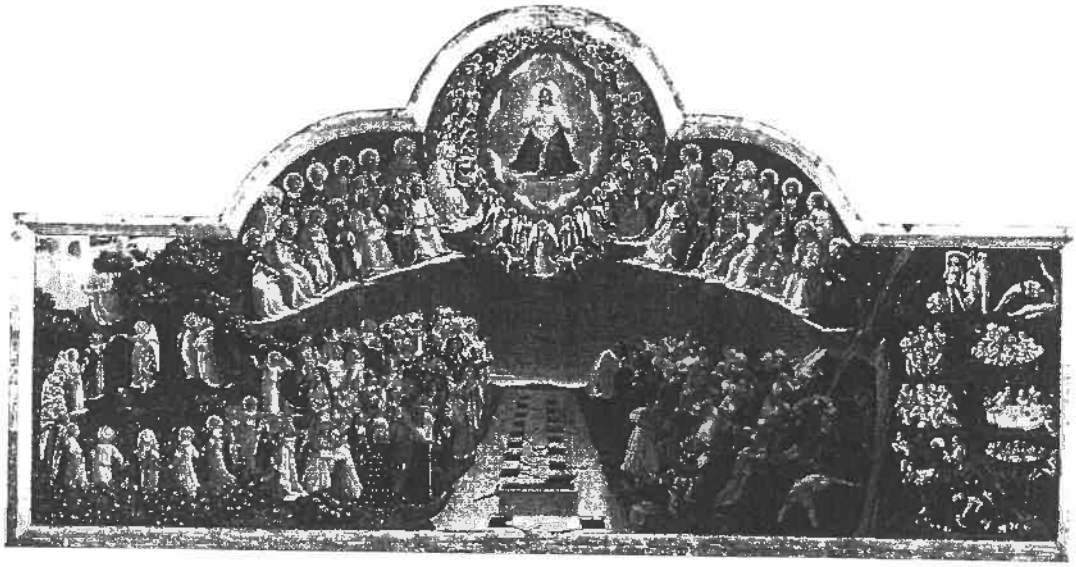
the artists at Pisa and Florence or even by Giotto.[10] Michelangelo rather chose to depict a psychological despair in his vision of the damned hurled into Hell. Figures of condemned souls [for example, Fig. 10] show the horror and devastation of those doomed to eternal damnation far more clearly than the worm-eaten skeletons of the medieval imagination, and "Hell" appears less as a physical place than as a psychological state of mind.

Dante's *Inferno* has been acknowledged as the source for the figures of Charon [Fig. 11] and Minos [Fig. 12], but in the *Divina Commedia*, as well as in the original classical sources for these figures, Charon is situated quite emphati-

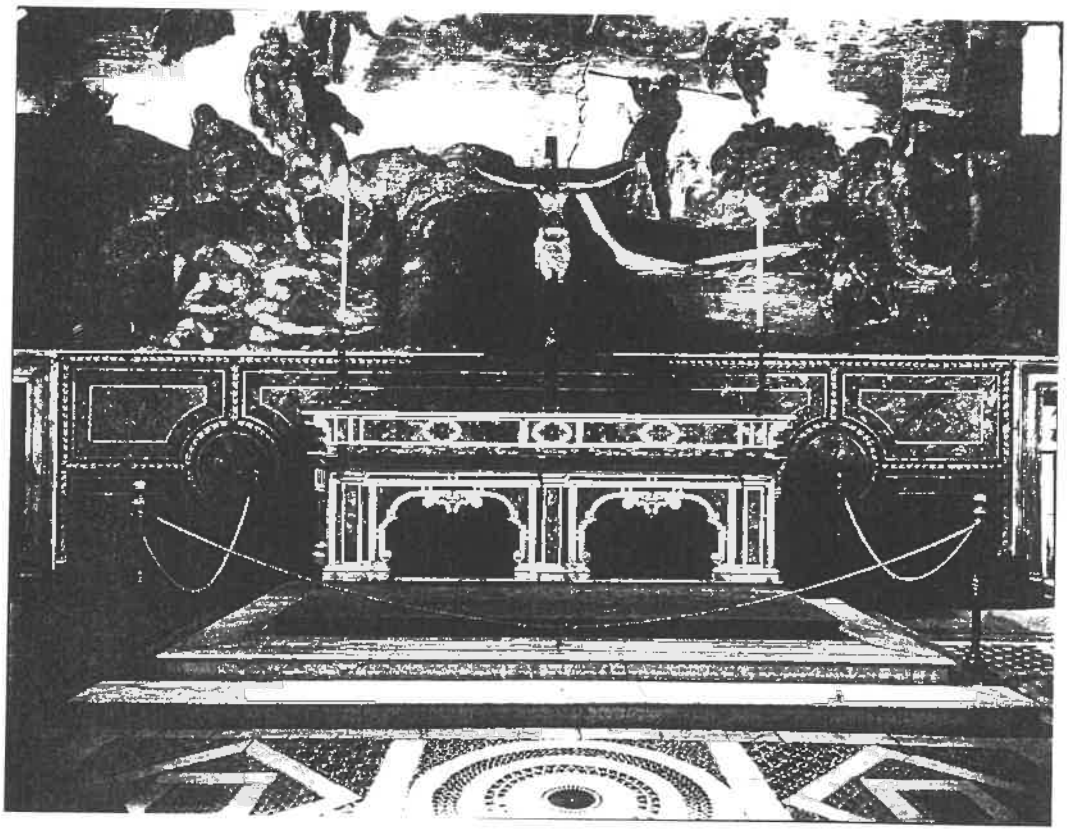
5| Giotto, «Last Judgment», c. 1305, fresco, Arena Chapel, Padua. Photo: Scala.



6) «Last Judgment», 1163-1250, tympanum, West Portal, Paris, Notre Dame. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

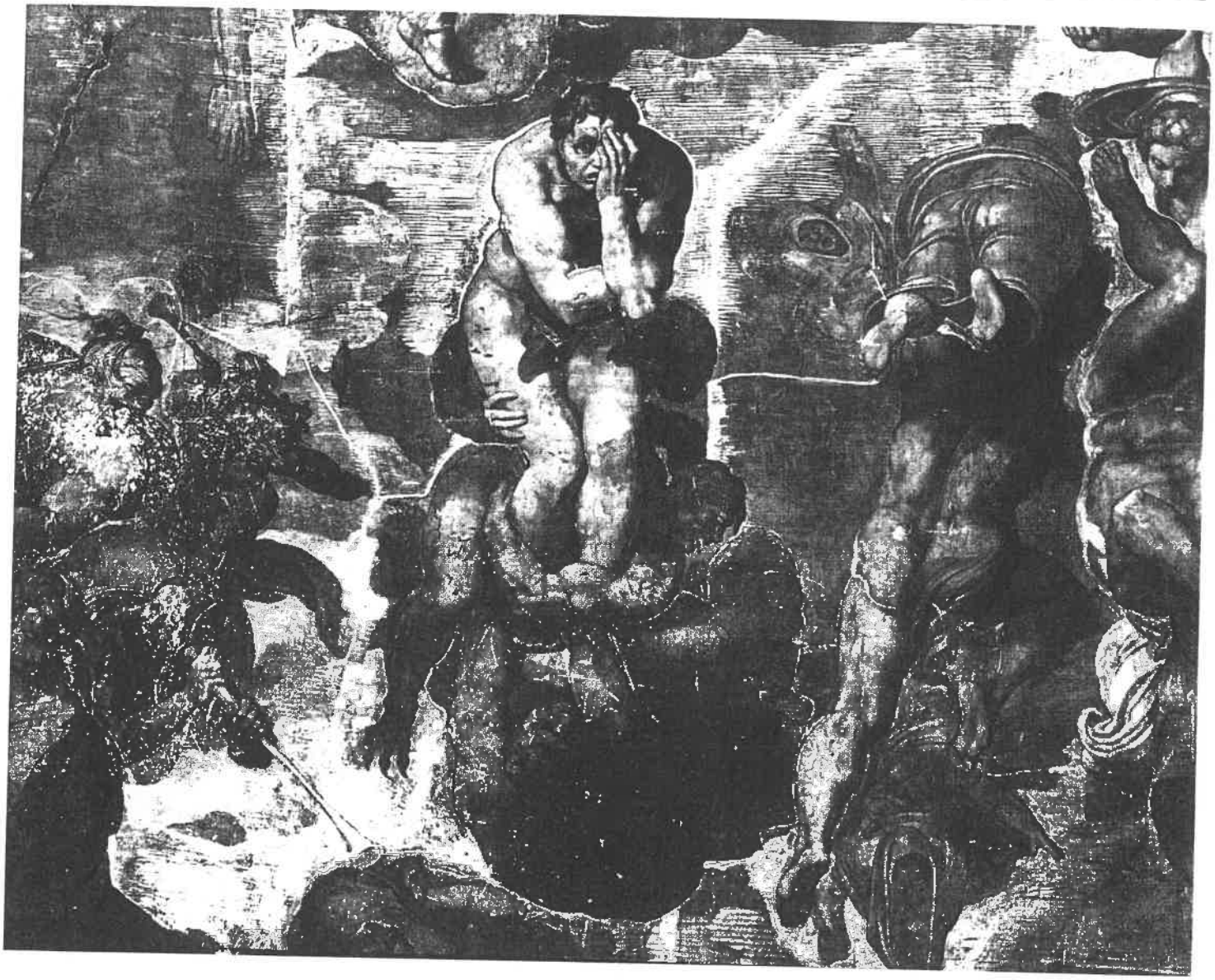


7) Fra Angelico (otherwise attributed to Zanobi Strozzi), «Last Judgment», c. 1440, altarpiece, 105 x 310 cm., Museo di San Marco, Florence. Photo: Scala.



8) Altar of the Sistine Chapel, in front of the Cave. Photo: Vatican Museums.

9) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail, Avarice. Photo: Vatican Museums.



10) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail of Damned Soul. Photo: Scala.

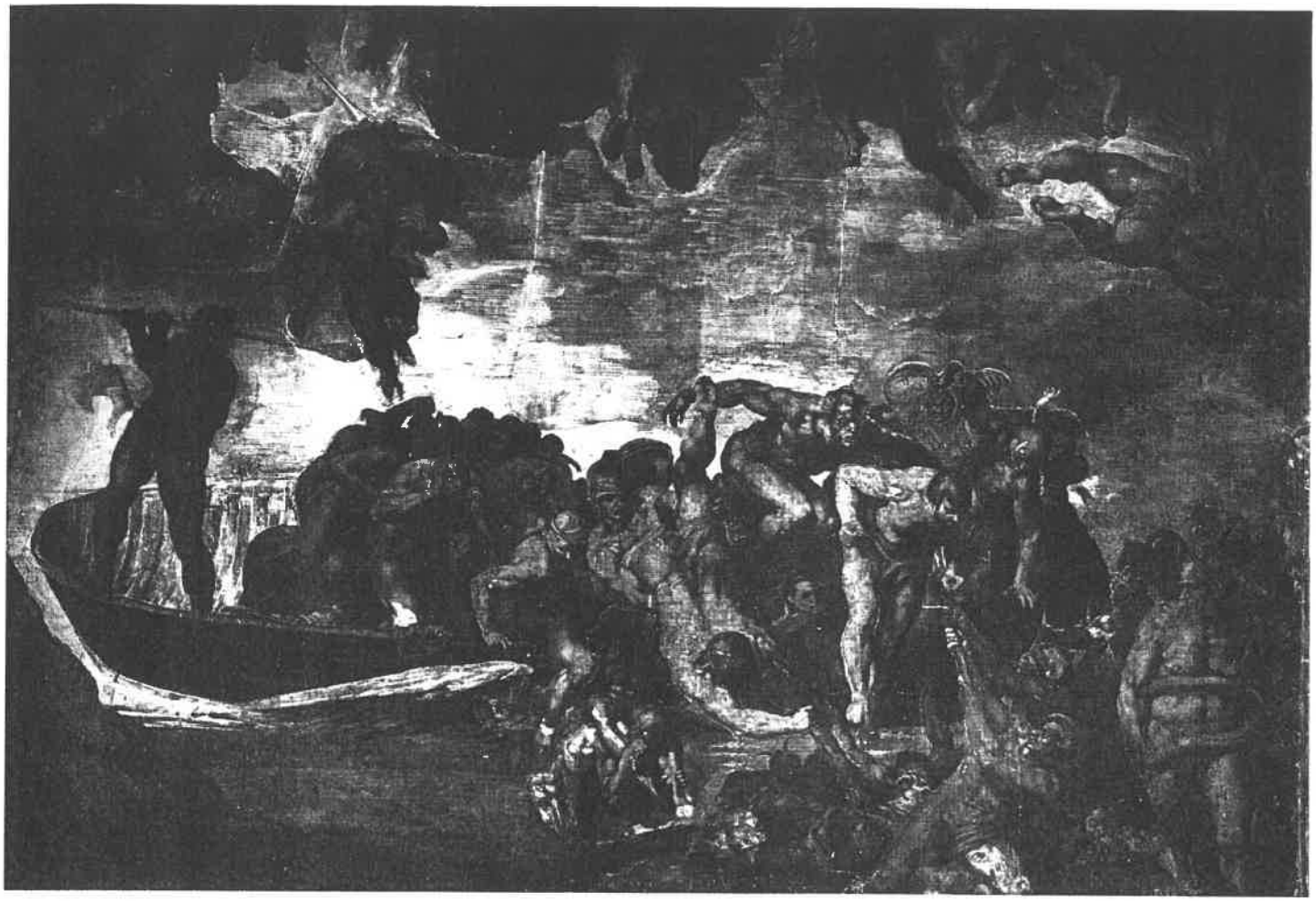
cally at the *entrance* to Hell, not in Hell itself, and Minos also stands near the entrance, examining the sins of those who enter.[11] It thus appears that "Hell" as such is not actually depicted here in the fresco, but exists somewhere beyond and below the picture space in the bottom right hand corner. Its presence is suggested rather than directly portrayed by the distant fires and the anguish of the figures. The damned are being directed towards the entrance of Hell which is clearly denoted by Minos beyond the very bottom right hand corner. In no way can they be read as

11) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail, Charon. Photo: Vatican Museums.

12) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail, Minos. Photo: Vatican Museums.

feeding into the central "Hell-cave" [Fig. 13]. Thus the question is raised as to the precise meaning of the separate Cave over the altar—which lies not at all in the direction in which the damned figures, those ejected from Charon's boat, are being propelled. The two scenes seem quite separate, sufficiently so as to suggest independent significance and meaning.

Few writers have attempted to explain this anomaly of two separate areas being used to indicate Hell and of the "Cave of Hell" being situated over the altar itself. Steinberg describes the problem as quite "baffling." As he further points out, most art historians simply tend to pass it by and the few who refer to it seldom agree.[12] Some authors draw attention to the puzzling matter of hell being situated over the altar,[13] for, although blackened by smoke from the altar candles beforethe recent restoration programme, the Cave itself and the arrangement of certain figures within it, together with a central fire, are clearly discernible. With the aid of Marcello Venusti's copy of 1549 [Fig. 14] and engravings by della Casa, 1543, Nicholas Beatrizet, 1562,



13) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail, lower zone, showing Hell. Photo: Vatican Museums.

Giovanni Baptista de' Cavalieri, 1567, and Martinus Rota, 1569 (Fig. 15), the arrangement in the Cave becomes even clearer.[14]

Although this Cave has been designated as "Hell" or "Hellmouth" by a large number of those writers who mention it specifically,[15] alternative possibilities of its representing Limbo or Purgatory have also been discussed. Tolnay, for example, amongst all his lengthy analysis of the fresco, gives just five lines to his discussion of this area. Referring to it as a "grotto," he finds the designation Limbo more appropriate than the usual "Hell"[16] Tolnay argues this on the basis that souls appear to be raised from the grotto and saved, and that Hell is actually a separate area at lower right. The idea that the Cave represented Purgatory was also proposed by Stendhal and Delacroix in the early nineteenth century.[17]

That these alternative explanations of the curious Cave over the altar appear unacceptable has already been demonstrated by Steinberg, who examines the problem in depth.[18] He finds the idea of Limbo proposed by Tolnay

14) Marcello Venusti, copy of the «Last Judgment» of Michelangelo, 1549, Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. Photo: Scala.

inept, since fire and flames, clearly evident in the fresco, play no part there. The idea of Purgatory appears to be equally unlikely, in spite of the argument established by Stendhal and Delacroix. Angels do appear to be rescuing or aiding former inmates of the Cave and the idea of the Cave as Purgatory would explain its separation from Hell proper in the lower right-hand corner. The struggle between angels and devils for human souls in that region appears apt, as well as the idea of purging by fire which is depicted within the Cave itself. The positioning of Purgatory at the site of the altar could be deemed appropriate, as a reference to the efficacy of the Mass in the saving of souls.[19]

However, as Steinberg also relates, the existence of Purgatory was a controversial issue in the mid-sixteenth century and regarded by many Catholics as mere medieval superstition.[20] It was perhaps unlikely, therefore, for Michelangelo to make such a positive statement on its significance. In addition, the "Cave" in question bears no resemblance whatsoever to Dante's familiar seven-storey edifice as described in *Purgatorio*[21] and Dante's concepts, derived from the *Divina Commedia* are recognized as being very closely followed elsewhere in the fresco. Chronologically, also, Steinberg reasonably points out that Purgatory operates prior to the Day of the Last Judgment and thus never had any place at all in Last Judgment iconography. The representation of Purgatory in art was extremely rare.[22]

Having thus discounted the explanation of the "Cave of Hell" over the altar in terms of Limbo or Purgatory, Steinberg also examines the way in which later copyists of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* have attempted to reintegrate it with the area of the "shores of Hell" and the "lake of fire" which clearly exist in the bottom right hand corner. Steinberg demonstrates that their aim appears in this to be the creation of one "entity" of Hell, as in the versions by Venusti [Fig. 14] and Rota [Fig. 15]. And these copies do seem to show the disquiet which was felt by contemporaries and copyists concerning the existence of two apparently separate areas of Hell, one of which was situated directly over the altar.[23] Steinberg also dismisses this alternative reading of one single area of Hell, alongside the Limbo/Purgatory approach, since, as he rightly shows, this is clearly not the intention of the fresco itself. He then proceeds to build on his earlier well known paper, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as Merciful Heresy,"[24] in order to develop his own interpretation based on the concept that "Hell" as represented in Michelangelo's fresco is a temporary hell, and that the punishments offered are not everlasting but remedial. This is part of what he views as "Merciful Heresy."[25]

It is at this point that the present discussion must part company with Steinberg in his examination of the problem and the relevant literature and interpretations. In addition to the various interpretations of the problem outlined above, it appears that other possibilities exist for the explanation of this "baffling" problem. One which was touched on by Steinberg was the idea of Christ's role in Hell and it is important to remember here that, in traditional iconography, depictions of the Last Judgment were occasionally combined with Christ's *Descent into Hell*, as at Torcello [Fig. 4]. The *Descent into Hell* of Christ is not mentioned in the New Testament. As Réau points out, it appears for the first time in the Gospel of Nicodemus, as part of the Apocrypha. The theme was propagated in the West through the *Speculum* of Vincent of Beauvais and the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, but the Gospel of Nicodemus remained the major source.[26] Contemporary interest in the Gospel of Nicodemus in Renaissance Rome has received some attention; it has also recently been proposed as a source for Michelangelo's art in the 1530's and 40's, and Michelangelo's involvement with the movement of Nicodemism has been argued through the evidence of his self-portrait as Nicodemus in the Florentine *Pietà*.[27] The popularity of the Gospel of Nicodemus itself has been demonstrated by Stechow,[28] and the second part of this gospel is almost totally concerned with the visit of Christ to Hell, where "He erected a Cross as a sign of Victory."[29] This could immediately provide us with a source and reason for Michelangelo's placing Hell, contrary to all expectation and tradition, over the altar of the Sistine chapel which has long puzzled scholars. Since the altar would always carry a Cross in the center (shown in many photographs [e.g. Fig. 8]), then the Cross of Christ (on the altar) would be placed directly in the center of this "Cave of Hell" as concurs precisely with the words from the Gospel of Nicodemus:

> "and so it was done and the Lord set his Cross in the midst of Hell, which is the sign of Victory and it shall remain there forever."[30]

Such an interpretation of the Cave over the altar would confirm a major theme of the fresco as one of hope, victory and salvation through the powerful Christ as much as of the gloom and despair of the damned. De Vecchi has noted that this type of more optimistic reading of the fresco has become increasingly discussed, and recent studies demonstrate "the decisive rejection of any reading centred too one-sidedly on its terrifying aspects; the presence of positive aspects ... has been established."[31]

15) Martinus Rota, copy of the «Last Judgment» of Michelangelo, 1569, engraving, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

The more optimistic or "hopeful" approach to the fresco also fits in well with the view of Michelangelo's Christ of the *Last Judgment* in terms of a Sun-symbol, which has become widely discussed as a major theme in the fresco. The reading of Christ, depicted as a beardless "Apollonian" type, has become immensely popular and almost ubiquitous in the literature from the time of the writings of Tolnay in the 1940's.[32] This concept has recently been fully examined in a paper, "Sun-Symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," where the apparent interweaving of different themes in the fresco has been emphasized according to Michelangelo's subtle synthesis of religious, neoplatonic, literary and purely scientific sources for the theme.[33] It was demonstrated that Michelangelo had access to the traditional Christian association of light and Sun-symbolism with the Deity, which was to some extent undergoing a revival amongst the Catholic reformers with whom he was associated.[34] Another source familiar to Michelangelo was Dante's *Divina Commedia* in which a tremendous emphasis is laid on the Deity as the Sun or a point of light in the center of the Empyrean.[35] The writings of the neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino also reinforce this theme of the Sun-Deity analogy, and the influence of neoplatonism upon Michelangelo, since his formative years spent in the house of Lorenzo de' Medici has also been widely accepted. Evidence for Michelangelo's interest in neoplatonism need not be repeated in detail here, but neoplatonic ideas, and particularly Sun-symbolism and cosmology do seem to have influenced the *Last Judgment*, while at the same time being incorporated with Catholic reforming ideas.[36] Finally, in assessing the representation of Christ as Sun-symbol in the center of the universe which seems to be a major theme in the Last Judgment fresco, it has been demonstrated that the actual scientific theory of Copernicus which placed the sun in the center of the circular universe was also available to Michelangelo and his patrons (Clement VII and Paul III) at the time of the commission of the fresco.[37] Michelangelo's exposure to Copernicus' theory of the heliocentric universe, and the probable significance of neoplatonic Sun-symbolism in the formation of the iconography of the *Last Judgment*, are particularly important for the way in which these different aspects were very much interlinked and part of a wide cult or interest in Sun-symbolism during the Renaissance, in which neoplatonism played a major role.[38]

For Michelangelo, a major source for neoplatonic Sun-symbolism was the work of Ficino, but, for Ficino (as perhaps also for Michelangelo), the *original* source of this comparison between the Sun and the Deity lay in the writings of Plato himself.[39] Ficino acknowledges his source for the concept of the sun as an allegory of the Deity as founded upon Plato's Sixth Book of the *Republic*, where the Good (Agathon) is compared directly with the Sun. Ficino mentions and discusses this at several points in his writings. In his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (otherwise known as the *De Amore*, 1484), which was widely circulated, he specifically names *Republic 6* as a key source for the concept. He writes, "Not without reason does Dionysius compare God to the sun... We certainly infer this comparison from the sixth book of Plato's *On the Republic*"; and, later, "But in the Sixth book on the Republic that divine man [Plato] explains the whole thing, and he says that the light of the intellect for understanding all things is the same God himself, by whom all things are made. For he compares the sun and God to each other...."[40]

Ficino also traces the ancient sources for the Sun-Deity analogy in his tract *De Sole* (1493) and here, again, he refers specifically to the writings of Plato, especially in chapters 9 and 11.[41] In his treatise on Pseudo-Dionysius' *De Divinis Nominibus*, Ficino again refers widely to the Sun-Deity analogy, as in his translations of the third-century neoplatonist Plotinus, where Plato's *Republic 6* is again cited as a specific source; in his own tract, the *Theologia Platonica* (1481), Ficino also acknowledges the significance of Plato's *Republic 6*.[42] Similar specific allusions occur in his commentaries on the *Parmenides, Philebus, Timaeus* and *Laws*, not to mention his commentary on *Republic* itself.[43] As in the *De Amore* and the *De Sole*, Ficino demonstrates how Plato extends the metaphor to embrace the notion of the sun as the source of light, warmth and life itself; the light of understanding and of Knowledge—in short, the Good. Plato's reference to the Sun as a metaphor for the Good was interpreted as a literal equation between Sun and Deity by the Renaissance neoplatonists like Ficino who were trying to integrate Christian and antique themes. All these references serve to demonstrate not only the prevalence of the Sun-Deity analogy, but also its recognized source in Plato's *Republic 6*. Without claiming direct great scholarly knowledge by Michelangelo of Ficino's Latin texts, it does seem highly likely that he must have been aware of Ficino's writings and, hence, with the neoplatonic concept and its origins. Evidence thus suggests that Plato's Sun metaphor appears to have been utilized by Michelangelo as a source for the Sun-Christ in his *Last Judgment* fresco.[44]

It appears particularly significant for the present discussion on Hell in the *Last Judgment* fresco that integrated with this highly important section of the *Republic* and directly following on from the platonic exposition of the Sun-Deity analogy on which a main theme of Michelangelo's fresco ap-

pears partly to be dependent, is the passage in which Plato introduces his famous metaphor of the Cave—perhaps the most familiar of all Platonic passages—which forms the main theme of *Republic* 7.[45] Plato's metaphor of the Cave is inextricably linked with the Sun metaphor of his previous section and, as such, may thus in turn explain Michelangelo's depiction of a Cave immediately above the altar of the Sistine chapel, as part of the main Sun-Deity theme in the fresco.

Plato begins his famous description of the Cave: "Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern,"[46] and then goes on to describe men who sit fettered with their backs to a fire, able to see only the shadows cast on the wall of the cave by moving objects or artefacts. These shadows they take for "reality." Philosophy can enable them to become free by drawing them out in painful ascent to the realm of day where all is illuminated "by the dazzling light of the sun" and they can then "rise through the pure ideas of reason to the idea of Good." Simply stated, their situation in the cave is symbolic of human bondage and ignorance. Plato demonstrates how these "perpetual prisoners" may be freed. And here he refers back to the Sun-metaphor which dominates his previous section and which, as stated, may also be regarded as having been influential upon Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco as a whole.[47]

The men of Plato's cave are to be freed and "drawn out into the light of the sun." At first the light of the sun blinds them even more, but then the human soul becomes accustomed to the light and is enveloped in its warmth and goodness. This process allegorically represents the contemplation of higher things (the Good, according to Plato; God, according to Ficino) and by this means, the soul can escape its bonds and ascend to the intelligible region.[48] The last and most difficult thing to perceive is the idea of the Good—the Sun itself. The process of illumination is an arduous one because "the passage from the deeper dark of ignorance into a more luminous world and the greater brightness had dazzled its vision," until "the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being—and this we say is the Good" (understood as God by Ficino).[49] Plato's Cave, the simple but effective idea of coming out of the dark into the light of reason and the Good (inextricably linked with Plato's Sun-metaphor) is a metaphor which might be readily understood—more so, perhaps, than some of Plato's more complex notions. It may also be recognized as being capable of potential Christian interpretation because of the central concept of coming out of the darkness into light. Light symbolism is frequently used in the Bible, especially in the Gospel of St John, where the presence of platonic influence has been observed.[50]

The same analogy of the Cave is again stressed by Plato in a later section of *Republic* 7.[51] Here, the progress from Cave to sunlight is emphasized and the key is said to be contemplation and education. "All this procedure of the arts and sciences,"[52] Plato says, is that which directs the soul to the contemplation of what is best amongst reality. Plato's Cave is thus directly related to the symbolism of the sun as an analogy with the Good or God. It is dependent upon the way in which, by its own light, the sun makes its own realm or self intelligible.

Ficino's own translation and commentary on the *Republic* places an emphasis on the combined Sun-Cave metaphor, which is strengthened by his references to it elsewhere in his writings.[53] Other specific references to Plato's Cave and *Republic 7* are to be found in Ficino's commentaries on the *Philebus, Timaeus* and *Laws*, and it is often cited in conjunction with the Sun metaphor of *Republic 6*.[54] In the *Theologia Platonica, Republic 7* is again specifically discussed and translated at several points, as well as in Ficino's work on Plotinus.[55] The idea that Plato's Cave had become a topical matter for discussion during the Renaissance is also shown by Ficino's letters to his friends and associates. In particular, Ficino's letter to the theologian Angiolieri incorporates Ficino's "word for word" translation of Plato's text.[56] Although Plato's use of the metaphor had educational significance in the context of the training of the Guardians of the Republic, Ficino comments particularly on its spiritual meaning, when explaining the allegory. He gives a clear image of the arrangement of the Cave and demonstrates how man is able to escape from the darkness of the Cave of ignorance and "go forth from darkness into sunlight, ... rising from utter folly to the vision of brilliance."[57] If, in Michelangelo's fresco, the Sun-Christ is depicted as Ficino's "vision of brilliance," as in *Republic 6*, then the Cave at the lower edge might plausibly possess an association with the Cave of *Republic 7*.

Apart from Ficino's own writings and letters, further evidence for the prevalence of knowledge of Plato's metaphor of the Sun and Cave (and hence Michelangelo's likely acquaintance with the idea) is also to be found in the works of other philosophers, as for example, Pico dell Mirandola (1463-94). The idea of the Sun-Deity analogy occurs in his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), as well as in his *Heptaplus*, where it is a major theme.[58] Pico also referred specifically to Plato's metaphor of the Cave in his writings, which demonstrates contemporary knowledge of this passage.[59]

In the center of the lower edge of Michelangelo's fresco of the *Last Judgment* the large Cave is clearly defined. Some figures peer from the gloom. A clearly human presence is suggested by the nude back view of a figure outlined by the

16) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail of nude in Cave. Photo: Vatican Museums.

17) Michelangelo, «Last Judgment», detail of Cave area, showing figures moving outwards and upwards. Photo: Vatican Museums.

central fire whose glow is seen in the depths [Fig. 16]. Outside the Cave, to the viewer's left, are figures moving away, outwards through a breach in the Cave and upwards towards the Sun-Christ [Fig. 17].[60]

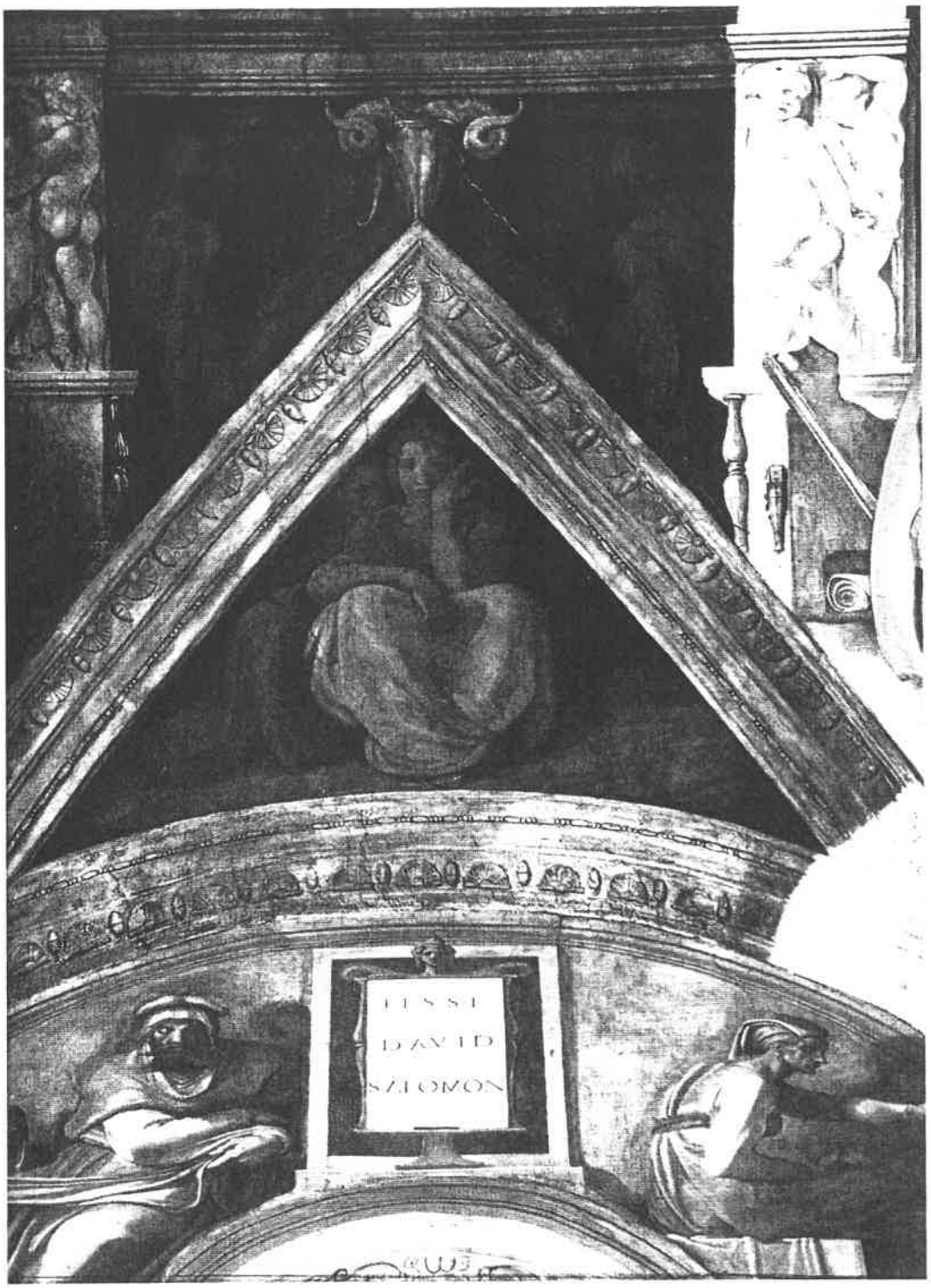
This Cave, then, might be considered as capable of possessing reference not only to the Christian Hell but also to Plato's Cave. The figures close by the Cave are clearly not being drawn into it (feet first), but rather coming out of it, travelling upwards towards the Sun-Christ. These who have been damned are not being pulled into this "Cave of Hell," but they are being propelled (on the right hand side of the fresco) in a completely different direction. The idea of figures "coming out" of the Cave appears far more appropriate to Plato's Cave than to the Christian Hell: the notion of "escape" from Plato's Cave is more logical than any idea of the damned escaping from the Christian Hell. Men are symbolically freed by coming out into the light of the Sun-Deity. "Hell" itself seems, in fact, hardly to be depicted in the fresco at all, since, as has already been pointed out, Charon and Minos, situated in the extreme lower right-hand corner are avowed, by both ancient writers and by Dante to be situated at the *entrance* to Hell.[61]

The idea of Michelangelo's probable awareness of Platonic "Cave" symbolism has significantly been mentioned already in the context of the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. In the recent publication following the restoration of the ceiling frescoes, Chastel has observed that in the dark figures of the ancestors of Christ in the lunettes on Michelangelo's ceiling "we may be reminded of the dwellers in the Cave of Plato's *Republic*, incarcerated in surroundings where light appears only as a reflection ...."[62]. This interpretation seems appropriate for those who lived prior to Christ, who peer out from the darkness of a cave-like space [Fig. 18], yet it seems strange that the Cave over the altar has not been considered in the same terms.

In an historical context, the reading of the Cave in the fresco as connected with the Platonic metaphor or escape from darkness into the light of the sun also seems appropriate. Although, as mentioned above, recent scholarship has suggested a more optimistic reading of the fresco, it has often been argued that the *Last Judgment* reflects the aura of pessimism and despair of the time of its creation, caused by the notorious Sack of Rome in 1527, by the forces of the Emperor Charles V. Clement VII de' Medici, who inaugurated the commission, had suffered terribly and the fresco has frequently been read as a symbolic representation of this catastrophe which severely affected the whole of Rome.[63] Yet the contemporary historian, Guicciardini (1483-1540) presents a rather different picture of the situation in 1533 when the commission was actually determined. According to Guicciardini (writing in 1537-40, before Michelangelo's fresco was even completed), Clement VII had great hopes of resolving the political and theological problems with which he was faced, by 1533. The Sack of Rome had taken place six years earlier and marked a particularly bad time for Italy and the Pope. The shameful captivity of the Pope was followed by rebellion in Florence, outbreaks of plague and a humiliating peace treaty. However, as Guicciardini relates, by 1528 the Pope, who had fallen from power, been held in captivity and suffered the loss of Rome and his dominions, was "within the space of a few months ... restored to liberty" and "once more restored to his former greatness."[64] Peace was established not unfavorably to the Pope by the Treaty of Barcelona (June 1529) between Pope and the Emperor, and the Treaty of Cambrai (August 1529) between the Emperor and the King of France (partly arranged by the Papal agents Cardinals Salviati and Schönberg). The Emperor showed respect to Clement VII in their meeting at Bologna (November 1529), and he also assisted Clement in quelling the rebellion in Florence in 1530.[65] As Guicciardini relates, these manoeuvres "put an end to the long and grave wars which had continued for more than eight years with so many horrible occurrences."[66]

A call was made for a Council to reform the Church at this time, which displeased the Pope because he feared loss of power, but he was able to stave this off and, according to Guicciardini, "tranquillity" continued through 1530-32. The departure of the Turks from Europe in 1532 removed yet another threat. Another major problem, namely that of the secession of the English Church under Henry VIII in 1533, was not regarded as irreversible at the time, and there was still hope for reconciliation with the German protestants.[67] Thus at the time of the commission of the *Last Judgment* in 1533, the Pope was once more in a strong position. In addition, when the earliest preliminary discussions concerning the commission were made, as Guicciardini tells us, the Pope experienced "incredible joy" over a marriage treaty with France. Clement VII was actually on his way to France to negotiate the marriage of his niece Catherine de' Medici with a French prince, when he met Michelangelo (apparently for the first discussions on the new commission) at S. Miniato al Tedesco, between Pisa and Florence, on 22nd September, 1533.[68] In December 1533, after his return from an immensely successful visit to France, notes our contemporary source, Clement "returned to Rome with the greatest reputation and marvellous happiness, especially in the eyes of those who had seen him prisoner in the Castel Sant' Angelo." Even allowing for the bias of the contemporary historian (and Guicciardini was *persona non grata* with the Medicis after the siege of Florence), this hardly describes a "period of catastrophe" or an atmosphere of doom and pessimism in late 1533 / early 1534 when the commission was first inaugurated.[69] As in the metaphor of Plato's Cave, Pope Clement had come out of the darkness into the light in the years 1528-1533. Clement's success was short-lived, for he died soon afterwards (September 1534), but the commission was carried out according to his wishes by his successor Paul III, who saw the commission "unchanged" through to its conclusion.[70] This present interpretation of the Cave seems, therefore, to fit in well with the historical circumstances of the fresco's creation. It also fits in well with recent art historical interpretation of the fresco which detects a less pessimistic aura in the fresco, than numerous earlier references to its dark desperate atmosphere.[71]

If the cosmological explanation of the Sun-symbolism in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* together with its neoplatonic overtones is considered, then it seems totally plausible that a neoplatonic explanation of the Cave at the center of the lower edge of the fresco is also viable. Too sophisticated to portray a medieval Hell of torture, Michelangelo



18) Michelangelo, Sistine ceiling, detail of lunette, «Ancestor of Christ». Photo: Vatican Museums.

depicts a psychological state of Hell in the expressions and gestures of the damned souls who fall hopelessly towards Hell. The central Cave over the altar itself is representative of platonic notions of human ignorance, despair and spiritual death, from which darkness man is to be freed to come out into the light of knowledge and truth symbolized by the Sun, the source of light and life. This concept is given Christian, Neoplatonic meaning in Michelangelo's fresco as man is freed from the darkness of Hell through knowledge of the Sun-Christ. This interpretation which relates to the contrasts between the darkened Cave and the bright vision of Christ above has been reinforced now that the cleaning of the fresco has been completed. While the upper areas had have their former brightness revealed so that they are once more perceived in terms of Sun and light, as they were by contemporary copyists and engravers, like Rota [Fig. 15],[72] the lower areas have remained relatively dark since contemporary reports describe them as such. Anton Francesco Doni commented on the darkness of Hell which Michelangelo painted, in a letter to the artist in January 1543.[73]

One explanation of the placement of the Cave, perceived as the Cave of Hell, over the altar which has been discussed here has been based upon the reasoned interest of Michelangelo in Nicodemism and the Gospel of Nicodemus; a second is derived from Plato's Cave and its relationship with the symbol of the Sun as Deity, as has been noted already in the fresco. The scriptural interpretation related to the descent of Christ into Hell as described in the Gospel of Nicodemus does not necessarily contradict the idea of the Cave as also bearing reference to the Cave of Plato, but may in fact be regarded as complementary. In terms of Christian neoplatonism, the two concepts share the overriding theme of Salvation through knowledge of what is Good, equated with knowledge of Christ and His sacrifice. In platonic thought, men are freed from the Cave of ignorance by spiritual contemplation. Just as Christ conquers the darkness of Hell to set men free, so, according to the platonists, reason conquers the darkness of ignorance, despair and spiritual death. In Christian exegesis, Christ's visit to Hell and his conquest represent the triumph over ignorance and evil. Where the "Good" was equated with "God" by the neoplatonists, and the platonic Sun-Deity analogy was given expression in the depiction of the Sun-Christ, then Plato's Cave might be viewed, in this context, as a psychological equivalent of the Christian Hell, and hence as more or less one and the same thing.[74] There appears to be in Michelangelo's Cave, a subtle synthesis, as elsewhere in the fresco, of platonic and Christian concepts which are mutually reinforcing and also far more subtle than medieval depictions of Hell's tortures. The neoplatonic interpretation of Sun-symbolim and circular cosmology in the *Last Judgment* fresco, which can be related to a Christian interpretation of Plato's *Republic* 6, may thus lead to the conclusion that the cave over the altar really represents Plato's Cave (*Republic* 7). Conversely, it might be argued that the presence of a Cave in the work, corresponding to *Republic* 7, confirms the idea that the depiction of the Sun-Christ in a circular format is related to Ficino's interpretation of Plato's *Republic* 6—an argument notable for its perfect circularity.

Linked with the use of the Sun-Deity analogy in the fresco, the Christian neoplatonic explanation of the "Cave" suggests both books 6 and 7 of Plato's *Republic* as critical source material for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. This being so, a reassessment of the common concept that Michelangelo was influenced by neoplatonism only in the earlier part of his career might be called for, and further deductions concerning Michelangelo's late period might also be made.

According to the above hypothesis which claims Plato's writings (through the Florentine neoplatonists) as a major influence upon the *Last Judgment*, different aspects of the theological and philosophical influences, which have frequently been relegated to separate periods of Michelangelo's *oeuvre*, are combined in this late work. The simplistic approach which is often argued, namely that of neoplatonism in his early works and Catholic influences in his later works, ceases to appear valid. Much of the existing literature attributes neoplatonism to Michelangelo's early works, contrasting this with a later spirituality, but readings which categorize the work of this artist into simple neoplatonic or religious stages are inappropriate. Tolnay referred to the "fundamental paganism" of the artist in his assessment of the *Last Judgment*, and Réau referred to the *Last Judgment* as "la paganisation de l'art Chrétien." Goldscheider has commented that the *Last Judgment* actually "marks the end of Michelangelo's pagan phase."[75] More recently, Liebert has spoken of the "battle between Christianity and Neoplatonism" and attempted to show how Michelangelo "relinquished neoplatonism and turned to Christian beliefs in the 1530's"—a line of argument also indicated by Steinberg who refers to Michelangelo's "profound religious conversion" at about the time of the *Last Judgment*.[76] By contrast, Hartt is among those who claim it is unrealistic to maintain that Michelangelo had "ever been anything but profoundly religious."[77] The evidence for neoplatonism in Michelangelo's late work of the *Last Judgment*, where it appears to be totally integrated with Christian thought, would reinforce this latter idea. The two trains of thought are not to be regarded as mutually ex-

clusive. Evidently Michelangelo's association with the *Spirituali* in the 1530's must have exerted a great deal of influence upon the artist, but his interest in neoplatonic ideas surely continued at this time, while incorporated within a Christian framework. The present reading of the *Last Judgment* would tend to reinforce the evidence for Michelangelo's neoplatonism, and the continuation of its influence on his works even into his late period. Neoplatonism, combined and integrated with deep Christian feeling, seems to have been a continuous feature in Michelangelo's work throughout his lifetime and platonic thought was never simply a classical, or pagan and irreligious, feature of his early works.

[1] Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Last Judgment* (painted 1536-41), fresco 13.7 x 12.2 m, Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome.

[2] For this tradition, which was greatly influenced by the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* and *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, see, for example, E. Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, London, 1961, chapter 6; L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien*, 3 vols., Paris, 1957, part 2, pp. 727-757; and recently (in connection with the difference between this standard format and Michelangelo's own interpretation) P. de Vecchi, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," in A. Chastel et al, *The Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo Rediscovered*, London, 1986, p. 182.

[3] These concepts are further discussed in V. Shrimplin, "Sun-Symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 21, 4 (1990), pp. 607-643 and, more fully, in V. Shrimplin, unpublished Ph.D. thesis of the same title, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1991, esp. chapters 2 and 3.

[4] The disciplinary function is also examined by S. Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, Ithaca, 1984, esp. p. 22f.

[5] For further discussion of French portal sculpture, see Mâle, *Gothic Image*, pp. 365-387.

[6] The association between Christ and the sun, His birth at the winter solstice and His death and resurrection at the Spring equinox has been discussed by such authors as H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, London, 1963 (esp. chapter 4, "The Christian Mystery of the Sun and Moon,"); and H. Flanders Dunbar, *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the Divine Comedy*, New York, 1961 (chapter 3, "Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its center in the Sun," and Appendix IV, "Imagery of the Sun-Storm God in the New Testament.")

[7] Other examples by Fra Angelico include altarpieces in Rome, Pisa and Berlin, 1445/50. Northern examples of the type, which demonstrate the widespread nature of this approach, include versions by Petrus Christus, 1455; Dieric Bouts, 1470; Hans Memlinc, 1473. The tendency towards a right/left separation also occurs in French sculptured tympana, where the saved and damned are sometimes placed at either end of the same horizontal register (as at Amiens).

[8] Chastel et al, *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 25. Compare also D. Redig de Campos, *Michelangelo, The Last Judgment*, New York, 1978, p. 35, n. 8 (originally published in Italian under the title *Il Giudizio Universale di Michelangelo*, Milan, 1975). The probable reason for the reverse orientation of the Sistine Chapel, in line with the reverse orientation of St Peter's itself, appears to be connected with solar mythology. Lees-Milne has argued that it was the interest of its founder, the Emperor Constantine, in solar worship which caused him to have the Basilica built so that the rays of the rising sun would fall on the celebrant at the High altar during the mass. Subsequent rebuildings followed this orientation. (J. Lees-Milne, *St Peter's Basilica in Rome*, London, 1967, p. 77).

[9] Figures in this area appear to personify the seven deadly sins, an idea which related to an earlier scheme proposed by Pope Clement VII. This is discussed by L. Steinberg, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* as Merciful Heresy," *Art in America*, 63 (1975) p. 53.

[10] For further examples and discussion of this approach, see M. Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, Princeton, 1978. Meiss argues for an increased pessimism reflected in art after the Black Death.

[11] For Charon, see Dante, *Inferno* III, 76f. and compare Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 394-401 and Homer, *Odyssey* XI, 568. For Minos, see Dante, *Inferno* V, 4f. and Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 568-572. Minos is placed by Dante at the entrance to the second circle of Hell. For further details of the classical sources, see also R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. Harmondsworth, 1977, vol. 1, chapter 31, "The gods of the Underworld," pp. 120-125 where additional sources in Homer, Virgil and Ovid are cited.

[12] L. Steinberg, "A Corner of the Last Judgment," *Daedalus*, 109 (1980) pp. 207-73. See esp. pp. 243-250 and nn. 54 and 58 on pp. 268-

269. The problem was not discussed by Michelangelo's contemporary biographers Ascanio Condivi (1553) or Giorgio Vasari (1568) and has been somewhat passed over by modern art historians (for example, F. Hartt, *Michelangelo*, New York, 1964; H. Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, London, 1975; R. S. Liebert, *Michelangelo, A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Images*, New Haven, 1983; L. Murray, *Michelangelo*, London, 1990 [1980] and *Michelangelo, His Life Work and Times*, New York, 1984; M. Salmi, *The Complete Works of Michelangelo*, New York, 1965; R. Salvini, *The Hidden Michelangelo*, London, 1973; H. von Einem, *Michelangelo*, London, 1973).

[13] Redig de Campos found the term "Mouth of Hell" inappropriate (Redig de Campos, *Michelangelo*, n. 4 on p. 52) although this had been suggested by Steinmann (E. Steinmann, *Die Sixtinische Kapelle*, Munich, 1905, p. 548.). Of the few other writers (apart from Steinberg) who have briefly discussed the problem, Wilde perceived the "Mouth of Hell at the altar" as a sign of the pessimism of Michelangelo (J. Wilde, *Michelangelo. Six Lectures*, London, 1978), while recently de Vecchi has commented that "the Mouth of Hell ... placed exactly over the altar of the Chapel" was unlikely to have indicated an attack on the Curia (P. de Vecchi in Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 202). [References to the problem are also found in more popular works on Michelangelo, such as R. Coughland, *The World of Michelangelo*, New York, 1966 ("Hell ... right over the altar") and E. Camesasca, *Michelangelo Buonarroti*, London, 1969, p. 120 ("The cave identified by some as the Mouth of Hell" or "Limbo")].

[14] For details of these and other copies, see C. de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 5 vols., Princeton, 1943-60, vol. 5, *The Final Period*, figs. 257-259; Steinberg, "Corner of the *Last Judgment*," pp. 245-248, and figs. 13-15; and A. Chastel, *A Chronicle of Italian Renaissance Painting*, New York, 1983, pp. 196-199.

[15] Salvini refers to the *mouths* (plural) of Hell (Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 132 and also in Salmi, *Complete Works of Michelangelo*, p. 237). It is strange that he should thus acknowledge the existence of a "double" Hell without considering or providing any theological explanation. Other references to the cave or mouth of Hell, not already mentioned at n. 13 above, include V. Mariani, *Michelangelo, the Painter*, New York, 1964 ("This mysterious cave at the center"—p. 104); Hartt, *Michelangelo* ("Hell Mouth"—p. 132); J. W. Dixon, "The Christology of Michelangelo. The Sistine Chapel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LV, 3, pp. 503-533 ("Mouth of Hell"—p. 515); M Hall, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* Resurrection of the Body and Predestination," *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976), pp. 85-92 ("pit"—p. 91); and so on.

[16] Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 43. According to the official Catholic definition, Limbo is a term used to designate the state and place of those souls who did not merit Hell and its eternal punishments, but could not enter Heaven before the Redemption—for example, infants who have died unbaptized (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, pp. 762-63). The issue was discussed but not resolved at the Council of Trent and remained one of the great unsettled questions, without official endorsement. [The Oxford Dictionary defines Limbo as a "Region on the border of Hell assigned to those who have failed to be Christians because they have not had the chance."]

[17] Discussed by Steinberg, "Corner of the *Last Judgment*" p. 268, n. 54. The Catholic definition of Purgatory is "the state, place or condition in the next world which will continue until the Last Judgment, where the souls of those who die in the state of Grace but not yet free from all imperfection make expiation for unforgiven venial sins ... and by so doing are punished before they enter Heaven," (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*). [According to the Oxford Dictionary, Purgatory is a "place appointed for those who have died in grace but have sins to expiate."] Neither Limbo nor Purgatory is explicit in the Scriptures. Both are related to, but chronologically precede, the idea of Divine Judgment.

[18] Steinberg, "Corner of the *Last Judgment*," esp. p. 243.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 249.

[20] *Ibidem*, and nn. 60 and 62 on p. 269.

[21] Dante, *Purgatorio, passim*. See new translation (with text) by A. Mandelbaum, *The Divine Comedy. Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, 3 vols., New York, 1982-86. For visual images of Dante's system, see P. Brieger, M. Meiss and C. S. Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy*, 2 vols., London, 1969.

[22] Steinberg, "Corner of the *Last Judgment*," p. 250: also Réau, *Iconographie*.

[23] Steinberg demonstrates ("Corner of the *Last Judgment*," p. 245f.) how, in these subsequent engravings, the rejects from Charon's bark appear to be "beached" in the immediate vicinity of the "hell-cave," but, as he points out, this is a distortion of the original design.

[24] Steinberg, "Merciful Heresy," as in n. 9 above.

[25] Steinberg, "Corner of the Last Judgment," p. 250f.

[26] For the *Descent into Hell*, see Réau, *Iconographie*, p. 531f. See also A. D. Katsonis, *Anastasis, The Making of an Image*, Princeton, 1986.

[27] V. Shrimplin, "Michelangelo and Nicodemism: The Florentine *Pietà*," *The Art Bulletin* 71, 1 (1989), pp. 58-66. This paper is concerned with Michelangelo's involvement with the Catholic Reformation from the 1530's. For the Gospel of Nicodemus itself, see M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1969. [A similar argument has recently been independently put forward by J. Kristof, "Michelangelo as Nicodemus," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20, 2 (1989), pp. 163-182.]

[28] W. Stechow, "Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus?," *Studien für Toskanischen Kunst, Festschrift für L. Heydenreich* (ed. W. Lotz, L. L. Moller), Munich, 1964, pp. 289-302. The Gospel of Nicodemus was also suggested by von Einem as a source for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (H. von Einem, *Michelangelo*, London, 1973 [1959], p. 155).

[29] See James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 94-146.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 123f. For details of the actual cross which would have been used here in Michelangelo's time, see Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 105.

[31] De Vecchi in Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 201. Steinberg is also among those who present a more "optimistic" reading in his "Merciful Heresy."

[32] See C. De Tolnay, "Le *Jugement Dernier* de Michel Ange. Essai d'interpretation," *Art Quarterly*, 3 (1940), pp. 125-146, esp. p. 144; *idem*, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, esp. pp. 47-49; *idem*, *Michelangelo, Sculptor, Painter, Architect*, Princeton, 1975, esp. pp. 59-60. Other authors who comment on the beardless, Apollonian or sunlike Christ are numerous (eg. von Einem, *Michelangelo*, p. 148; Salvini, *Hidden Michelangelo*, p. 135; Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, p. 246; Steinberg, "Merciful Heresy," p. 49; and recently J. M. Greenstein, "'How Glorious the Second Coming of Christ,': Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and the Transfiguration," *Artibus et Historiae*, 20 [1989], pp. 33-57. Greenstein relates the Sun-Christ particularly to the Transfiguration).

[33] Shrimplin, "Sun-symbolism and Cosmology," as in n. 3 above and unpublished Ph.D. thesis of same title.

[34] For scriptural sources, see esp. Malachi 4:2; Matthew 17:2; Revelations 1:16, 11:1, 21:23. The concept repeatedly recurs in the writings of the Church Fathers, esp. St Augustine whose works have been argued as influential upon Michelangelo (E. G. Dotson, "An Au-

gustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling," *The Art Bulletin* 61 [1980], pp. 223-256). For revival of the concept during the Catholic Reformation, see for example Valdés' *Considerationes* (in J. Nieto, *Juan Valdés and the Origins of the Spanish and Italian Reformation*, Geneva, 1970, pp. 230-239, *passim*) and further references as cited in Shrimplin, *Sun-Symbolism and Cosmology*, esp. chapter 5 (as in n. 3 above). The actual depiction of Christ as a beardless Apollonian figure was, of course, common in Early Christian art.

[35] Literary sources for Christ as Sun-symbol are to be found in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, esp. *Paradiso* XXX-XXXIII (see Flanders-Dunbar, *Symbolism in Medieval Thought, passim*; J. A. Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso*, New York, 1968, chapter 6). Solar imagery was popular in the literature and poetry of the Renaissance, including works by Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo himself (see Université de Bruxelles, *Le Soleil a la Renaissance. Colloque Internationale*, Bruxelles, 1963).

[36] For Michelangelo's interest in neoplatonism, see for example, E. Panofsky, "The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo," in *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1972 (1930), pp. 172-230. For Ficino, see P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, New York, reprint, 1964; and, more recently, M. J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, Berkeley, 1984; J. Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols., Brill, 1990. For references to Sun-Deity imagery in Ficino's writings, see esp. Marsilio Ficino, *De Amore*, speech 2, chapter 2 (in S. Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino. Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, Dallas, 1985, p. 46—a revised version of his 1944 edition) and Marsilio Ficino, *De Sole*, esp. chapters 2-6 (easily accessible in *Renaissance Philosophy, eds. A. B. Fallico, H. Shapiro, vol. 1, The Italian Philosophers*, New York, 1967, pp. 118-141).

[37] On Copernican heliocentricity, its relation to earlier scientific theory and neoplatonic ideas, and its pre-publication dissemination, see (*inter alia*), T. S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution. Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought*, Cambridge, Mass., 1957; A. Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers, A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe*, Harmondsworth, 1984.

[38] See Shrimplin, as in n. 3, for full discussion of ideas briefly touched on in the preceding notes (34-37 above). It appears significant that the commissioning Popes, Clement VII Medici and Paul III Farnese, had the same early background as Michelangelo in the household of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

[39] Much of the discussion on Michelangelo and neoplatonism was produced in the 1940's by writers like Erwin Panofsky, Charles de Tolnay, Sir Ernst Gombrich, Edgar Wind and Anthony Blunt. Although the 1576 Basel edition of Ficino's *Opera Omnia*, has been reproduced in a limited facsimile edition in 1959, it still remains rather difficult of access (Marsilio Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, Turin, 1959). However, there has been a significant increase in the amount of scholarship on Ficino, coupled with translations of key works, by writers like S. Jayne and M. J. B. Allen, which have made Ficino's writings more easily available since the 1970's and which have yet to be fully considered as essential background to Michelangelo—and indeed to the Renaissance in general.

[40] *De Amore, ed. cit.*, pp. 46 and 134 (see *Opera Omnia*, II, 1, pp. 1324 and 1351). Ficino's reference is to Plato, *Republic*, Book 6, 507a-509d. (Edition used in the present study: Plato, *Republic*, text and translation, ed. P. Shorey, 2 vols., London, Loeb, 1978-1982, 1st printed 1914-1935, vol. 2, pp. 100-107; and compare Plato, *Republic*, ed. B. Radice and R. Baldick, Harmondsworth, reprint 1985, pp. 265-274).

[41] Ficino, *De Sole, ed. cit.* pp. 129-131 and 134-135.

[42] For Sun-Deity imagery in Ficino's treatise on Pseudo-Dionysius, see *Opera Omnia*, II, 1, esp. pp. 1025-27, 1031, 1043, 1047 ("sol ut putat Plato noster, visibilis imago Dei..."), 1068 ("sol visibilis imago dei"), 1097 ("comparativo solis ad Deum"), etc. For references to *Republic* 6 in Ficino on Plotinus, *ibidem*, II, 2, esp. caput 3, pp. 1561-62. For similar allusions in the *Theologica Platonica*, see Marsilius Ficinus, *Theologica Platonica de Immortalitate Animorum*, Hildesheim, 1975 (reprint of 1559 ed.), book 12; discussed by A. B. Collins, *The Secular is Sacred. Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino's Platonic Theology*, The Hague, 1974, pp. 76-77.

[43] For specific references to *Republic* 6 (on the Sun and the Good) in Ficino's *Commentary on the Parmenides*, see *Opera Omnia*, II, 1, pp. 1155-1156; in the *Philebus Commentary*, book 1, chapters 5, 8, 15, 26 and 31, see *Opera Omnia*, II, 1, pp. 1212, 1215, 1221, 1231-32, 1241 ("ideo Plato in sexto de Republica, bonum ipsum per solis imaginem figuravit"). For this see also M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary*, Berkeley, 1975, esp. pp. 109, 239, 303. References also occur in Ficino's commentaries on Plato's *Theatetus* (*Opera Omnia*, II, 1, p. 1280); *Sophist* (*ibidem*, p. 1293); *Cratylus* (*ibidem*, p. 1313); *Timaeus* (*ibidem*, pp. 1442 and 1474); *Laws* (*ibidem*, p. 1526) and, of course, *Republic* itself (*ibidem*, pp. 1406-1408 for section on *Republic*, book 6).

[44] For further discussion of Ficino's dependence on *Republic* 6 for his Sun-Deity imagery, see Kristeller, *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, esp. pp. 98f and 233; Allen, *Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, esp. pp. 117 and 186-87. It is not only Ficino's very wide use of the Sun-Deity analogy in his writings, but his specific and acknowledged source of Plato's *Republic* 6 (and Michelangelo's likely awareness of this) which is relevant here.

[45] *Republic* 7, 514a-517b. For succinct further explanation and discussion of Plato's metaphor of the Cave, see Radice and Baldick (eds.), *Plato. The Republic*, pp. 278-286; Shorey (ed.) *Plato. Republic*, p. 118; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1986, vol. 4, pp. 503-520; P. Shorey, *What Plato Said*, Chicago, 1933, 230-238; J. E. Raven, "Sun, Divided Line and Cave," *Classical Quarterly*, new series, 3, 1 (1953), pp. 22-32; J. Ferguson, "Sun, Line and Cave Again," *Classical Quarterly*, 13, 2 (1963), pp. 188-93; J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford, 1981, esp. chapter 10, "Understanding the Good: Sun, Line and Cave," pp. 242-272. (The present hypothesis is naturally less concerned with the nuances of modern discussion of Plato's analogy than with its basic idea.)

[46] *Republic* 7, 514a (translations taken from Shorey).

[47] *Republic* 7, 517a (Since space does not allow full discussion of what is considered to be "reality" by Plato, nor is this essential for a basic understanding of the metaphor, the word "real" is here used in inverted commas, following Shorey.)

[48] *Republic* 7, 516a-517b. The description of the "fettered" prisoners also bears comparison with Michelangelo's bound *Slaves* from the scheme for the Julius tomb, esp. those known as the *Dying Slave*, and *The Rebellious Slave*, which seem to refer to the same Christianized, platonic concept (see Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 4 and *idem*, *Michelangelo, Painter, Sculptor, Architect*, figs. 91 and 93).

[49] *Republic* 7, 518a-518d. For Ficino on God as the Good, see Kristeller, *Philosophy of Ficino*, esp. pp. 145 and 261.

[50] For discussion of Ficino's comments on Plato's metaphor of the Cave, see *ibidem*, esp. pp. 223 and 384. Rahner comments on the likelihood that Plato's metaphor of the Cave is related to ancient solar beliefs (Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mysteries*, p. 89). See also N. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, London, 1935, for the Florentine neoplatonists' interpretation and Christianizing of ma-

jor tenets of platonic philosophy. For platonism in the gospel of St John, see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1972 (1953), esp. part 2, chapters 1 and 7.

[51] *Republic* 7, 532a-533a.

[52] *Republic* 7, 532c.

[53] For Ficino's *Commentary* on Plato's *Republic*, see *Opera Omnia*, II, 1, pp. 1396-1438, esp. pp. 1406-1408 (on *Republic* 6) and pp. 1408-1412 (on *Republic* 7).

[54] Other precise references to Plato's Cave and *Republic* 7 occur particularly in Ficino's commentaries on *Philebus* (*Opera Omnia*, II, 1, pp. 1207, 1230, 1231); *Timaeus* (p. 1473); and *Laws* (p. 1526), in conjunction with *Republic* 6. General references to *Republic* in Ficino's works are far too numerous to mention, but books 6 and 7 (alongside, perhaps, books 2 and 10) seem to receive the most attention.

[55] *Theologia Platonica*, for example book 6, where he gives a full translation of Plato's text (*ed. cit.* pp. 83-84); and book 16 (*ed. cit.* p. 303). See also Ficino's commentary on Plotinus's *Enneads* (*Opera Omnia*, II, 2, pp. 1561-1562 in conjunction with *Republic* 6; and p. 1592 "ex speculo concavo ad solem").

[56] See Marsilio Ficino, *Letters* (trans. and ed. by Members of the Language Department, School of Economic Science, London), 4 vols. London, 1975-88, vol. 3, pp. 55-59 (letter no. 26).

[57] *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59.

[58] Pico dell Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, in Fallico (ed.), *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, esp. pp. 152-153. See also R. B. Waddington, "The Sun at center: Structure and meaning in Pico della Mirandola's *Heptaplus*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1973), pp. 69-86, esp. pp. 78-79 where he refers to Plato's *Republic*.

[59] Pico della Mirandola, Letter to Ermolao Barbaro, 3rd June, 1485, reproduced in Fallico (ed.) *Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 113. The theme was also referred to by the neoplatonist Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes*, II, 22 (cited by A. Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'Art*, Geneva, 1975, n. 5 on p. 166) and no doubt further references will come to light in due course.

[60] Although previously blackened by smoke from the altar candles, figures of human souls as well as demons are clearly discernible. This condition was improved with the cleaning of the fresco, completed in 1994.

[61] Certain features of Plato's cave are admittedly not present in Michelangelo's Cave. There are no "artefacts" or moving systems between the figure and the fire which it seems to face and there are also a number of figures which are clearly "devils." But the Cave itself and the fire within are very prominent. Even though it is not literally "fettered," the rear view of a clearly human, naked figure is depicted and other human figures are seen escaping outwards and upwards into the brightness of the Sun above. It also appears significant that, connected with Plato's Sun-Cave metaphor is his so-called "Divided Line" symbol (*Republic* 7, 509d-511d). Whether any correspondence may be traced between the Divided Line and the arrangement of Michelangelo's fresco must be a matter for further investigation.

[62] A. Chastel, "First Reactions to the Ceiling," in Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 72.

[63] De Vecchi, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," in Chastel et al, *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 181, citing Chastel; (or, more popularly, Coughland, *World of Michelangelo*, p. 127). For the Sack of Rome itself, see G. R. Elton (ed.), *New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 2, *The Reformation, 1520-59*, Cambridge, 1958, p. 344f..

[64] F. Guicciardini, *The History of Italy* (first published 1561), trans. and ed. S. Alexander, New Jersey, 1984, pp. 384-398, esp. p. 398.

[65] *Ibidem*, pp. 408-412, 417f., 422-423 and 430. For the Treaties of Barcelona and Cambrai, also *New Cambridge Modern History*, p. 345.

[66] Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, p. 425.

[67] *Ibidem*, esp., pp. 401-405, 434-437. For succinct comment on the "Turkish problem" see *New Cambridge History*, pp. 514-516.

[68] *Ibidem*, p. 440. Michelangelo's meeting with Pope Clement VII at S. Miniato al Tedesco was recorded by the artist himself and is very likely to have been the date of the first discussions for the new project (see Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, pp. 19 and 99; Redig de Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 25; de Vecchi in Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 176 and n. 3 on p. 268). An oft-quoted letter of Sebastiano del Piombo to Michelangelo dated 17th July 1533 clearly demonstrates that a large new commission was projected at this time, by mid 1533 (quoted *ibidem*, p. 176 and also, by L. Murray, *Michelangelo, His Life, Work and Times*, London, 1984, p. 157, among others).

[69] Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, p. 440 (which contrasts with the way in which it has so often been termed "a period of catastrophe"). Ramsden also refers to the period as "relatively peaceful" and to "the triumph" of the marriage treaty with France (E. H. Ramsden, *The Letters of Michelangelo, Translated from the Original Tuscan*, London, 1963, vol. 2, appendix, p. 286).

[70] Vasari alludes to the work as having been commissioned by Clement VII and to "inventions which had been decided" (G. Vasari, *Lives of the Artists, 1568*, ed. G. Bull, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 378); Condivi mentions "what he had already begun in Clement's time" (A. Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo, 1553*, ed. H. Wohl, Oxford, 1976, pp. 75 and 83). See also the *motu proprio* of Paul III, dated 17th November 1536 (reproduced in Redig de Campos, *Michelangelo, Last Judgment*, p. 97).

[71] De Vecchi in Chastel et al., *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 201, already cited above, n. 31.

[72] For other similar contemporary "visual readings," see Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, figs. 257-259; Chastel, *Chronicle*, pp. 196-199; and R. de Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, Rome, 1978, figs. 8-35, *passim*.

[73] Cited by Murray, *Michelangelo, Life, Work and Times*, p. 164.

[74] It is interesting to consider other representations of Caves in Christian iconography which might have been related to similar themes, such as the Cave of the Nativity (more commonly depicted as cave than stable in the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church), and the Cave of the Entombment. In both cases, Christ emerges from the Cave for the Salvation of mankind from ignorance and darkness.

[75] Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, vol. 5, p. 38; Réau, *Iconographie*, pp. 753-754; L. Goldscheider, *Michelangelo. Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, London, 1975.

[76] R. Liebert, *Michelangelo. A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Images*, New Haven, 1983, respectively pp. 312 and 294, and see also pp. 340 and 355-356; L. Steinberg, "The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Paintings," in *The Language of Art*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell, Chicago, 1980, p. 208. See also E. Garin, "Thinker," in Salmi, *Complete Works of Michelangelo*, pp. 517-530, who recommends "caution" in platonic readings of Michelangelo's work (p. 520) and Hall, who appears to view Christian readings as alternatives to the platonic, and questions Michelangelo's neoplatonism (Hall, "Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," p. 88).

[77] F. Hartt, "The Evidence for the Scaffolding of the Sistine Ceiling," *Art History*, 5, 3, pp. 273-286, p. 285. Hartt comments on the combination of Christian and neoplatonic themes on the Sistine ceiling.