

1) "A viewer's experiences, attitudes, and expectations affect what is seen or experienced in any artwork. As expectations vary from day to day, the same person may experience and evaluate an artwork differently at different times." (Transcendence with The Human Body in Art p.130-131)

2) The richness of religious art is partly a result of an artist's portrayal of the entire biblical story rather than one single small feature. "The biblical story should be seen fully and not heard partially. Since visual art may present simultaneously a number of separate events or ideas, such images are able to give us a sense of wholeness while readings often give us only a part." (Eyes To See Wholeness, p. 1)

3) The veiling and unveiling of a work, as in Christo's art, reminds us of the interplay of light and darkness, of covered and uncovered, of the value of different experiences that reveal more in a work of art. I have found squinting the eyes while looking at a painting will often reveal more as one is able to notice forms and structures in the dimness that are often blocked by fuller light. (Transcendence with The Human Body in Art)

4) "To be trained in the discipline of seeing involves the total engagement of the viewer, and the viewer in turn is transformed." (Art As Religious Studies, p. 5)

5) "This kinesthetic method helps many students see in a painting or sculpture the details they miss when just looking. This method helps the viewers remember similar body shapes and gestures they have experienced in other works of art as well as in daily life." (Ibid. p. 200-201)

Each of these five ideas provides me a way to describe more fully my experience with Caravaggio's painting. At various points in this paper I will refer to the above five ideas as they have informed my seeing.

Before telling the particular story of my encounter with "Calling of St. Matthew," I should first explain something about previous experiences with Caravaggio's work.

I have experienced Caravaggio's paintings at Santa Maria del Popolo and Santa Luigi dei Francesi in Rome three times, and each experience has offered me unexpected surprise.

On my first visit to Santa Maria del Popolo, I noticed a small group of people in a chapel. As I approached, I saw they were absorbed in the paintings on the wall. Noting the people to be from the United States, I asked, "what are we seeing here?" They showed me the two paintings on the wall, "Crucifixion of St. Peter" and "Conversion on the Way to Damascus." The women marveled at how these famous paintings were so accessible, and so fragile in that location, with the afternoon sun shining upon them.

I was immediately attracted to "Crucifixion of St. Peter" because of the way Caravaggio captured a calm, serene look on Peter's face as his pierced body is awkwardly raised upside down on the cross. His executioners are shown in a state of confusion and

discomfort as they try to raise the martyr. Caravaggio portrays the executioners' human struggle in counterpoint to the peaceful look of resolve on Peter's face. This was my introduction to Caravaggio, and the beginning of a fascination with his use of light and darkness in his canvases.

A month ago I again was in Rome, and again treated to another surprising view of Caravaggio's work. This time I gained a lesson in perspective.

The night before, we had visited Piazza Navonna, and I had stopped into a record store and discovered it to be the perfect place to find gifts for my daughters. Being without my money, however, I asked in Italian if they would be open in the morning, and found they would be at 9:00 a.m. Early the next morning I returned, and waited for the store to open. I strolled around the piazza and studied Bernini's fountain and the obelisk raised above it. As 9:00 came and went, I realized that the store had not opened. I wondered if I had gotten the time wrong--maybe I didn't catch the clerk saying "nuovo mezzo" or 9:30.

Knowing Santa Luigi dei Francesi was nearby, I decided to visit my old friend Caravaggio while waiting for the store to open. Entering the church, I was pleasantly surprised to find that I was the only person there. I strolled to the chapel where Caravaggio had set three canvases, "Calling of St. Matthew," "St. Matthew and the Angel," and "Martyrdom of St. Matthew." The chapel was darker than I expected and at first, the dark canvases were barely visible to my eyes. I had no coins for the coin-operated lights that would illuminate the paintings. I was disappointed, yet decided to stay and see what I could see.

Concentrating on "Calling of St. Matthew" I began to see things I hadn't seen before in a previous visit--the darkness revealed new details, and as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, even more stood out. ("A viewer's experiences, attitudes, and expectations affect what is seen or experienced in any artwork. As expectations vary from day to day, the same person may experience and evaluate an artwork differently at different times." (Transcendence with The Human Body in Art [p.130-131]).

In the dark, for example, I noticed the window above the hand of Christ, and saw for the first time the cross in the window, and how the line of the cross extended down to Christ's hand. I could see the diagonal of light/darkness that extends downward from the top right to the bottom left of the canvas, and how the brightest face is that of the young attendant to Matthew's left. Matthew's face is next brightest, and third brightest is the man leaning over Matthew's right shoulder. In the darkness I could see the boy's face shining, and in that light I wondered: was this boy the center of the painting, and not St. Matthew? Wasn't it Matthew who wrote, "except as ye become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"? The dim light was changing my perspective, and opening up new interpretations of Caravaggio's great painting. ("The biblical story should be seen fully and not heard partially. Since visual art may present simultaneously a number of separate events or ideas, such images are able to give us a sense of wholeness while readings often give us only a part." [Eyes To See Wholeness, p. 1]).

Next, I saw a "diagonal of hands"--first the hand of Christ pointing toward Matthew, then Matthew's hand clearly pointing to himself (a detail I had missed during all previous viewings, as the finger appears to point to the man hunched over on his right. In the darkness the finger more clearly points inward toward Matthew's body). Extending down from Matthew's hand are the other hands on the table, counting the money. This "diagonal of hands" reveals a central theme: between the appointing hand of Christ and the money counting hands on the table is the questioning hand: is it me that you are pointing to? Matthew is seen at the moment of decision regarding God or mammon--his right hand is on the money on the table while his left points to himself. Between God and mammon is the choice--which one will it be? "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24)

There also seems to be a diagonal of darkness, and a diagonal of light. From the upper right, through the hat of the boy and to the head of the man completely engrossed in his counting, is the dark diagonal. From the center left to the middle right is the diagonal of light, culminating in the boy's face. Only by seeing this painting in the dim light could I detect these diagonals. ("The veiling and unveiling of a work, as in Christo's art, reminds us of the interplay of light and darkness, of covered and uncovered, of the value of different experiences that reveal more in a work of art. I have found squinting the eyes while looking at a painting will often reveal more as one is able to notice forms and structures in the dimness that are often blocked by fuller light." Personal reading notes from *Transcendence with The Human Body in Art*).

After thrilling to the new details emerging in the different light, it was time to get back to the record store.

After leaving the church, I went back to Piazza Navonna, and realized that the store still was not open. Yet in that instant I had that flash of "AHA!"--the new perspective gained from the chapel at S. Luigi dei Francesi opened my mind enough to realize--recognize--that I had been waiting in front of the wrong store, that I was at the opposite end of the square from where I had been the previous night. The store was where it should be, and had opened at 9:00 a.m. --I just had entered the piazza from a different direction and was waiting in the wrong place. Just as the darkness in the church led to new understanding, so did that experience open me to realize I'd reversed my perspective in the piazza. Just as the revelations in the darkness changed my view of this painting, so did that change in perspective open me to realizing I needed a new perspective in order to find that record store! ("To be trained in the discipline of seeing involves the total engagement of the viewer, and the viewer in turn is transformed." [Art As Religious Studies, p. 5]).

Once home, I have studied this painting further, and have found that in the fuller light of reproductions, there is yet more to see. While the painting illustrates the obvious scriptural calling of St. Matthew, "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him." (Matthew 9.9), other passages are illustrated:

The boy sitting to Matthew's left, central in the picture, and with the most lit face, may well be Caravaggio's illustration of "Except as ye become like little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Could it be that the boy will come along with Matthew, or at least have his life changed at some later date by the One who is calling Matthew in that moment?

The sword in the bottom center of the painting could well be illustrating both Matthew's martyrdom (depicted on the opposite wall from this painting) and Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:34, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

The inkwell, pen, and book on the table, used to record the taxes, will take on a new function as Matthew takes up this book in the service of the Gospel and begins to record the acts of God, not the accumulations of mammon. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven..."(Matthew 6.19).

The cross in the window, and the sword by the soldier's side both illustrate Matthew 10:38-39, "he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." In the calling of Matthew the cross is revealed in the flung-open window cover. Calling and cross are dynamically linked.

As the Christ with halo calls the Matthew with a hat, we get the impression that Matthew will soon give up his hat for the halo of martyrdom.

The two sets of visible eyes, on the lit faces of Matthew and the boy next to him, show Matthew 6:22, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light." Likewise, the man to Matthew's right, engrossed in the money counting, needs to struggle with eyeglasses in order to see--his eye is not sound, focused as it is on mammon.

The light upon the central faces comes from Christ, "I am the light of the world."

Other details emerge: it is very hard to make out table legs--it appears the table is supported by human legs---this commitment to mammon is supported by human choice, and when enough legs abandon that table and follow Christ, the folly of choosing mammon will be seen.

The feather in the boy's hat points towards Matthew's finger while the feather in the other guard's hat points to Peter's finger. Notice Peter's finger in imitation of Christ's appointing finger--Peter, looking tentative, in the early moments of his own calling. Notice too the walking stick he holds in his left hand. After all twelve disciples are called, in Matthew 10, Jesus assembles them and tells them, "Take no gold...no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff..." Just as Matthew's life is changing, so will Peter's life continue to change ---he's given up his fishing and next he'll have to give up his staff--such continual change is a part of life with Christ.

Notice Jesus' hand. I wonder if a better title for the painting is the "Appointment of Matthew." There are no words suggesting a "calling" in this silent portrayal, as the calling is effected by the silent, pointing finger. "He stretched out his hand and touched him..." (Matthew 8:3)

It is here, at the hand of Christ, where we might employ the kinesthetic method of interpretation. Where have we seen that hand before? Isn't it the same hand that Michelangelo painted onto the Sistine ceiling: the hand of God creating Adam? By taking Michelangelo's God-hand and putting it on his Christ, Caravaggio is reminding us of Paul's interpretation of the nature of Christ in his letter to the Colossians, 1:15-25:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...all things have been created through him and for him. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first born from the dead...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

Christ is the new Adam (the hand), the fullness of God (the halo), bringing reconciliation (the calling of Matthew) to all things by the cross (the window). This is fun! ("This kinesthetic method helps many students see in a painting or sculpture the details they miss when just looking. This method helps the viewers remember similar body shapes and gestures they have experienced in other works of art as well as in daily life." [Ibid. p. 200-201].)

Finally, some thoughts about frontality. While Matthew's body is facing the viewer, and his upper body is leaning backwards, his legs seem ready to spring forward into action. Christ's body is facing the viewer as well. Trying his pose with our own bodies, noticing his right foot planted firmly facing the viewer, we realize he faces us and not Matthew. He is both ready to move out the door from which he had come in--here is a man of action and movement--and he is ready to face us, the viewers, as he turns to leave. I can see him looking me in the eye and extending his hand to me, or to any of us viewing this picture. I can see Matthew, in the next instant, facing the viewer frontally, and looking to see our response to the same call. We know what happened to both Jesus and Matthew. They seem to be ready to watch our response to their story.

A chance moment with a painting, themes revealed in the darkness, a lesson in perspective, and seeing illuminated by concentrated if not practiced viewing, all combine to provide a creative encounter whose lessons will inform my understanding of art and Gospel.