

The painting 'Sacrifice of Isaac' by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio depicts the biblical story of Isaac's sacrifice. In the foreground, Isaac lies on the ground, his body being prepared for sacrifice. His father, Abraham, is shown in a state of intense distress, holding a knife over Isaac's chest. A young boy, likely Isaac's brother Jacob, is seen from the side, pointing towards the scene. The background features a dark, wooded landscape with a small town and a church visible in the distance under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the figures against the dark background.

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(Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1601-2. Galleria Degli Uffizi, Florence.)

# The *Sacrifice of Isaac*: Caravaggio's Merge of the Spiritual and the Physical

The separation between the spiritual and physical worlds is a key characteristic of the *oeuvre* of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In his painting *The Sacrifice of Isaac* from 1601-2, however, Caravaggio, as he became known, brings the two worlds together and carefully intertwines them by capturing both the emotional complexities of life, as well as a deep reverence for God through the figure of Abraham (Fig. 1).



(Figure 1: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1601-2. Galleria Degli Uffizi, Florence.)

Caravaggio entangles these dialogues through Abraham, who straddles the two worlds and plays an important role in both the violence of the physical and a shared understanding of the spiritual. Through comparative analysis with several works by Caravaggio, I argue for the uniqueness of this image in Caravaggio's *oeuvre*, and the critical importance of the figure of Abraham within it.

Michelangelo Merisi was born on September 29, 1571 in the small town of Caravaggio, Italy. He studied painting for four years under the direction of Simone Peterzano in Milan. After his father's death, Caravaggio moved to Rome where he began working as a painter.

He struggled in his early years in Rome, where he painted only secular images that were seen as controversial and unnecessarily violent, especially when he depicted gory beheadings and deaths. Caravaggio's works of art seem to connect to his life, as he was frequently involved in physical altercations. He was arrested on various occasions for his violent outbursts, assaults, and the use of illegal weapons. Close to the end of his life, Caravaggio was even involved in murder, which forced him to flee Rome in order to escape execution. He often painted scenes depicting violent deaths, which could reflect the weight of the darkness that he felt in his life.

In his work, he typically “shows a few figures highlighted against the darkness [which] gives a rough profile of a man (Caravaggio) who tended to see human events in black and white.”<sup>1</sup> With the understanding of the difficulty and violence of Caravaggio’s life, it becomes easier to explain why brutality plays such a central role in his *oeuvre*.<sup>2</sup>

Caravaggio’s work is characterized by his use of tenebrism, the strong use of light and dark, which allowed for an increased emphasis on certain aspects of the scene and heightened the drama, pulling the viewer into the emotional narrative and allowing him/her to participate in it. Caravaggio lived in poverty, as he did not receive enough commissions to support himself as a secular painter.

Because of this, in 1596-97, he decided to change the subject matter of his art and began accepting more religious commissions. He began painting biblical scenes in the Baroque style and following the new guidelines put in place by the Catholic Counter-Reformation, established by the Council of Trent during its 25th session in 1563, which stressed the importance of painting scenes directly from the biblical text. The Church wished to place a stronger emphasis on prayer and meditation. In order to bring this tradition back to the Christian faith, the Counter-Reformation “prescribed that the meditator imagine a religious scene as if it were taking place before him ‘now’...and participate in it by means of the senses.”<sup>3</sup> Caravaggio followed this tradition in many of his religious works,

though he often went beyond these ideas, creating images that were considered to be controversial.

Within his works, the representation of the brutality found in the physical world is very present and confrontational. Caravaggio seems to recall the violence that was found not only in his own life but also in the everyday lives of his viewers. Throughout Rome, decapitations and public executions were seen on a daily basis, which may have contributed to Caravaggio’s realistic representation of tortured and horrified faces.<sup>4</sup> Through his many depictions of human emotion, it becomes clear that he desired to capture the “aggressive naturalism” that he was often faced with during his life.<sup>5</sup>

This specificity of the representation of violence can be seen in Caravaggio’s *Judith Beheading Holofernes* from 1599,

where Caravaggio depicts the violent moment when Judith's sword has sliced half way through the neck of Holofernes with blood pouring from his throat (Fig. 2). The strong emotions on the faces of Holofernes, Judith and the maid are a good example of the realistic and powerful expressions that he was able to recall from the violence that he was faced with in his everyday life. These expressions confronted the viewer and created a strong emotional response to the image. When looking at the faces of these figures, Caravaggio depicts a wide range of emotions: Holofernes stares up at the ceiling with his mouth open in a terrified scream, while Judith seems to pull back from her actions as her furrowed brow and tense posture suggest both hesitation and repulsion. The wizened maid, on the other hand,

stands with her eyebrows raised, expectantly and excitedly waiting for Holofernes' death.



(Figure 2: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1599. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome, Italy.)

In 1606, Caravaggio painted *David with the Head of Goliath* (Fig. 3). In this work, the viewer is confronted with the moment after David severs Goliath's head from his body. The scene is gory, as the severed head of Goliath, with life still in his eyes, stares into the darkness around him and blood pours from his neck. The head is believed to be a self-portrait of Caravaggio and reflects the tragic aspects of his life.<sup>6</sup>

With this piece, it seems that Caravaggio wants to shock and overpower the viewer with his own fear of punishment and death. While Caravaggio often incorporates the horror and fear that was present in everyday Roman life, he also, more importantly, captures the brutality and aggression found in his own life.

The violence of the physical world is not the only important theme present in Caravaggio's oeuvre. He also depicts the spiritual world, as he "brings sacred subjects down to earth."<sup>7</sup>



(Figure 3: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *David with the head of Goliath*, 1606. Galleria Borghese, Rome.)

By capturing the spiritual in the earthly realm, Caravaggio brings a physical tangibility to the spiritual world and allows the viewer to feel its presence in the work.

Caravaggio projects a human element onto the figures of Christ and the saints. He brings them closer to the viewer and offers a connection between these religious beings and the poor and common man. By giving these religious figures human traits, Caravaggio allows the spectator to engage more easily with the subject matter by representing the divine beings as relatable human figures.

Caravaggio's depiction of the spiritual world, however, can be found only in certain individual figures in his scenes. He typically creates a division between the characters: those who are and are not able to engage with the spiritual world on earth.

Within his works, Caravaggio allows certain figures to be able to see and recognize the presence of God, while others remain blind to the spiritual aspects of the scene. This concept, of those who can and cannot see, is shown through the use of eye contact and gesture, as well as through the use of light. Light becomes the embodiment of God, as it washes over those who are able to recognize the divine presence.

In the *Calling of Saint Matthew* from 1600, Caravaggio depicts a group of men, most of whom are totally unaware of the presence of Christ and his apostle, who stands next to him (Fig. 4). Christ points to Matthew, a Roman tax collector, calling him to join his mission. The light enters the scene from the right, above Christ, and washes over Matthew as he points to himself in response to Christ's call.<sup>8</sup>



(Figure 4: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Calling of St Matthew*, 1600. San Luigi del Francesi, Rome.)

The figures to the left of the scene play an important role, as they represent those who are unaware of the divine presence. They embody the ignorance of man, as they are concerned only with the secular world. The scene is set in a contemporary environment, as Caravaggio depicts a modern example of Christ's calling on humankind to trust in the power and strength of God. The ignorant men who sit at the end of the table counting their money are a perfect example of those who are enthralled only by material possessions.

The two men sitting closest to Christ and his apostle are both aware of their presence. The figure with his back towards the viewer leans over to speak with the apostle, and the other figure, who leans on Matthew's shoulder, looks directly at Christ. Although these men are able to recognize the presence of the figures of Christ and the apostle, there is no indication that they are capable of recognizing that they are the embodiment of divine beings. Matthew's expression is noticeably different from the other figures who look towards Christ, as he not only points to himself in recognition to Christ's call, but stares directly at Christ with raised eyebrows and wide questioning eyes. His expression sets him apart from the other figures at the table, as he is the only one who reacts emotionally in response to Christ's presence.

Caravaggio's *Conversion of St Paul* from 1601 is a very isolated and intimate scene of religious conversion (Fig. 5). Paul is sprawled out on the ground overwhelmed by the power of God, while the horse and servant seem unaware of Paul's interaction with the divine. Caravaggio's use of light is very important in the scene, and again, is used to represent the presence of God. The way in which Paul is thrown on the ground shows the intense power of God and Paul's



(Figure 5: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Conversion of St Paul*, 1601. Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.)

vulnerability and humility as he is put directly in the spotlight of God's divine grace. Paul "receives the literal enlightenment of conversion through the penetrating rays of God's light...an old man who is lighted but unenlightened by the divine efflorescence...is essential to provide a foil to Paul."<sup>9</sup> It becomes clear, that only Paul feels the power of God in the scene, as the servant is totally unaffected and unaware of the presence of God. The horse is just as unaware as the servant; it gazes toward Paul, but is completely ignorant as to what is going on. In the biblical passage, the men traveling with Paul were, in fact, able to hear the words of God as they spoke to Paul; however, they were not able to see where the words were coming from or comprehend the meaning of them.

The *Sacrifice of Isaac* was commissioned by Cardinal Maffeo Barberini in 1601-2. The commission of the work was personal as it was to be added to his private art collection.<sup>10</sup> Barberini was born in Florence to an aristocratic family. Throughout his life, he held many church positions and was finally elected Pope Urban VIII in 1623. Although Barberini commissioned the work for his personal collection, he still had Caravaggio follow the new guidelines that had been setup by the Counter-Reformation, as he was strongly against the rise of the Protestants and wanted to promote the teachings of the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> These guidelines specified that a religious work of art depict the biblical scene so that the viewer is confronted with a literal representation of the text,

which would avoid any heretical interpretations or misunderstanding of the subject matter. Religious art was to be easily recognizable and understood so that it could assist in personal reflection and individual meditation.

The *Sacrifice of Isaac* is a representation of the Genesis story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son to God.

God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham...Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering."... So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac...Abraham said to the young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." The two of them walked on together, Isaac said to his father..."The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb."... He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!...Do not lay your hand on the boy." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns.<sup>12</sup>

Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* very closely resembles this passage. By depicting an old man with a knife, a scared young boy, an angel and a ram, it becomes clear to the viewer that this piece is without a doubt a representation of the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac. The presence of the two shadowy figures on the road in the background also helps to further this determination, as they represent Abraham's two men who wait for his return. By comparing the narrative and the painting, one can see how Caravaggio remained true to Genesis, capturing the moment of highest intensity and drama when the angel stops Abraham from harming his son. In the painting, Caravaggio captures not only this one moment, but the past and future moments of the story as well: the presence of the two young men in the background,

the violence of the sacrifice before the intervention of God and the angel, the tension as the angel stops Abraham from killing his son at the last moment, and the appearance of the ram that will later serve as the true sacrifice. There are, however, two aspects of the story that Caravaggio alters. The first is the physical presence of the angel. In Genesis, the angel calls down from heaven to stop Abraham, but in the painting, the angel is brought down not only to the same plane as Abraham, but also grabs his arm in order to restrain him physically from killing his son. Through this embellishment of the text, Caravaggio is able to heighten the drama and increase the tension of the scene. The second aspect that he altered is the role of the ram, as it is not stuck in a thicket as the text states; rather, it stands free, looking up at the angel and Abraham.

It plays an active role in the image as a knowing figure that understands the significance of the scene and is able to recognize the presence and power of God.

The Sacrifice of Isaac was a popular subject for artists to depict in both painting and sculpture. Filippo Brunelleschi cast a bronze relief of the subject in 1401 in competition with Ghiberti for the commission of a new set of doors for the Florentine baptistery (Fig. 6).



(Figure 6: Brunelleschi, Filippo. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401. Museo nazionale del Bargello, Florence.)

Though he lost the commission, Brunelleschi's panel is important, as it is a work of art with which both Caravaggio and Barberini

would have most likely been familiar. Upon examining the panel, the viewer is able to see that both Brunelleschi's panel and Caravaggio's painting share similar basic elements: an angel who physically arrests the arm of Abraham before he can sacrifice his son, which was seen for the first time in Brunelleschi's panel, as well as the ram that will become the new sacrifice, and the presence of the two young men who accompanied Abraham to Moriah. Caravaggio may have incorporated these similarities upon the request of Barberini, who would have wanted the piece to recall Brunelleschi's famous panel as a reminder of his familial Florentine ties.

The scenes differ, however, in the manner in which they are composed. Brunelleschi fills his panel with as much imagery as possible, as the donkey and the two men who wait further down the mountain



are as large as Abraham himself. They occupy the lower half of the panel and take away from the impact and violence of the scene. By incorporating the two men and their donkey in such a large portion of the panel, the piece becomes horizontally divided, as the upper-most part of the panel depicts the spiritual world, and the rest of the lower section depicts the physical. The sacred presence of God is not felt as strongly in this image as it is in Caravaggio's. The angel is the only representation of the spiritual world, as he enters from the upper right and remains fairly detached from the scene, except for the contact between his hand and Abraham's arm. The role of the ram is also not as significant: it stands off to the side scratching its head, acting very much like the ignorant animal that it is,

and does not play an active role in the scene. Brunelleschi's representation of Isaac is equally different, as Isaac tries to struggle and twist away from his father. His face is turned away from the viewer staring up at the sky with his mouth open, perhaps in a scream. In contrast, Caravaggio's painting creates a strong spiritual presence through both the angel and his use of light, as well as through the active role of the ram. Caravaggio depicts both anguish and fear through the terrified and naturalistic expression of Isaac, as he stares out at the viewer and engages him/her in the scene. Brunelleschi's panel seems to have had an impact on Caravaggio, as there are many similarities that can be found between the two, but Caravaggio was able to carry his piece far beyond the innovations of Brunelleschi.

Lodovico Cardi, more commonly known as Cigoli, painted the *Sacrifice of Isaac* in 1607 (Fig. 7). He, like most other painters of the time, was very concerned with representing religious art as close to the ideals of the Counter-Reformation as possible, as artists would often find themselves in trouble with the Church when they deviated from these new guidelines, as Veronese did in *The Feast in the House of Levi* in 1573.



(Figure 7: Cigoli. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1607. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.)

When examining this work, it becomes clear that Cigoli strictly adhered to the guidelines of the Church and was not interested in embellishing or adding to the original story. He very literally depicts the biblical passage and does not stray from the text. In Cigoli's piece, there are similarities to Brunelleschi's competition panel, as he, too, would have been familiar with it. The few aspects of the piece that do not follow exactly from the text can be traced to Brunelleschi's interpretation. The angel reaches down and grabs Abraham's arm, as he does in Brunelleschi's. The ram also plays a very insignificant role, as he stands completely unengaged at the edge of the frame.

Cigoli, unlike Caravaggio, does not allow for further development or exploration of the scene. Cigoli remains fully devoted to the biblical text and remains within the guidelines of the Church. He emphasizes the importance of the story by depicting the scene without further interpretation, as it confronts the viewer with the teachings of the text and the spirituality of the moment. Cigoli and Caravaggio's works do share certain elements. They both put the focus completely on the sacrifice and the actions of Abraham, the angel and Isaac, and in doing so, the presence of the donkey and the two men in the far distance become barely distinguishable figures in the scene. Cigoli's depiction of the passage has a very different emotional presence than that of Caravaggio's. Cigoli's creates a very calm and peaceful atmosphere within his work as Isaac sits idly, totally submissive to his father.

The knife that Abraham holds seems to be pulled away from Isaac by the influence of the angel's hand, which removes the suspense of the sacrifice. In Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, the tension of the scene overwhelms the viewer as the screaming Isaac struggles under the force of Abraham's grip and the knife remains steady and close to his face as if the sacrifice may still continue.

Caravaggio's religious paintings followed the new guidelines of the Church. He depicts the struggles and violence of the physical world with the light of salvation originating from faith and trust in God. Caravaggio placed a "new emphasis on an inward process [that] evoked a heightened emphasis on the conversion of self through meditation on the mysteries of Christ."<sup>13</sup>

Within his works, he focused on the important role of God's spiritual presence in the physical world, but struggled with keeping entirely within the guidelines set up by the Counter-Reformation. In his paintings, he often depicted the biblical stories more closely than expected by placing religious figures and scenes in settings that the viewer would be able to relate to. He would increase the drama of these scenes by creating a sharp contrast between light and dark in order to emphasize the divine presence. This aspect of creating very relatable scenes went beyond the new guidelines of the Counter-Reformation and brought the teachings of the text directly into the world of the viewer. In setting the biblical events into an everyday setting,

Caravaggio is able to represent the common man and relate him to the divine realm. Caravaggio's representation of the world is very dark, and depicts an alienation from God. However, through the darkness and brutality of his scenes, Caravaggio offers a glimmer of hope, specifically through light, as the light of salvation, to the poor and defenseless.

In Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, brutality and violence immediately confront the viewer, as the figures are placed in the foreground and invade the viewer's space. The figures are placed close together: the intimacy of the scene merges the actions of each figure and creates a more chaotic and agitated depiction. The scene itself is set at the moment of highest drama. It represents the instant that the angel appeared to stop the sacrifice of Isaac.

It is the climax of the story and offers more tension and suspense than any other moment. He depicts the "inevitable pause between challenge and response... a reverberation in time, an implication of what has happened before and what will happen next."<sup>14</sup> The agitation, tension and suspense of the scene draws the viewer in and holds his/her attention long enough to discover the intricacies of the scene.

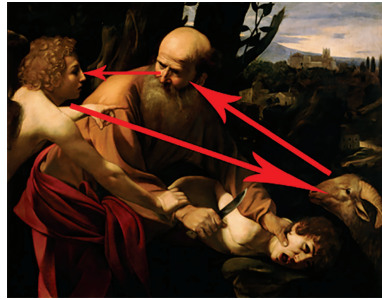
Examining the presence of the spiritual world in this image allows the viewer to see once again how Caravaggio contrasts those who do and do not have the ability to recognize the divine presence. Isaac is totally unaware of the presence of the angel or the divine light as his father holds him down for the sacrifice and he screams in terror. His wide dark eyes stare out at the viewer making eye contact with us and pulling us into the scene,

allowing us to share in his suffering. Abraham, on the other hand, is cognizant of God's spiritual presence. He turns toward the angel, who grabs his arm, and seems to understand that the violence of the sacrifice is over, that he will not have to kill his son. The viewer is able to see the dramatic struggle between infinite brutality and infinite devotion, as Abraham is bathed in the light of God and gazes toward the angel, while Isaac stares in terror at the viewer, completely unaware of the divine presence.<sup>15</sup>

Within the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Caravaggio creates two different dialogues that occur both simultaneously and separately from one another (Fig. 8). Within the intimate group of figures, Caravaggio forms two triangular compositions;

(Center Above)

(Figure 8: Breakdown of the two dialogues present in the *Sacrifice of Isaac*. Diagram by author, Giovanna Franciosa.)



Spiritual World (Figure 8)



Physical World (Figure 8)

one depicts the spiritual world, while the other represents the physical. Abraham, the angel and the ram, occupy the spiritual, as they engage with one another through understanding and trust in God. The triangular composition moves from Abraham's face, who gazes at the angel, to the angel, who gazes towards and points in the direction of the ram.

The ram gazes back at both the angel and Abraham completing the triangle of enlightened and faithful figures. As it looks up at them, with its dark eye, the ram seems very thoughtful, as it pensively takes in the scene and understands the importance of its role in the sacrifice.

The physical overlaps with the spiritual, though it holds a separate conversation. The viewer is pulled into the physical world through the intense gaze of Isaac. His dark black eyes stare in terror at the viewer and thus connect the physical world of the painting to the viewer's world outside the painted scene. From Isaac's eyes, the dialogue moves to Abraham's left hand, as it is pressed very forcefully into Isaac's cheek, up Abraham's left arm, across his shoulders, down his right arm to the right hand of the angel as it grabs Abraham's wrist.

The triangular composition continues to Abraham's right hand, as he holds the knife up to his son's neck, and screaming face. Though these two conversations act separately from one another, Abraham takes part in both. He straddles the two realms and plays an active role in each. His head, turned toward the angel, is engaged in the spiritual, while his body, most importantly his arms, act in the physical. The work, representing the violence, brutality and evil in the world, recalls the humility of humanity, and also reminds the viewer of humanity's desire to elevate the soul and become closer to God.

These dialogues act as two different and competing compositions within the work. Caravaggio contrasts the violence of the physical world with blind faith in the spiritual.

There is a peaceful serenity that can be found when looking at the angel, Abraham, and the ram in the spiritual. They gaze at one another with understanding and faith in God. There is no violence or anger present in this composition of pure faith. The physical, on the other hand, is the complete opposite. The agonized scream of Isaac, his pale skin contrasted against the dark metal blade of the knife, is brutal and terrible, as Isaac is alone and helpless against the aggressive force of his father.

Physical touch and eye contact play a very important role in this work. Without them, these two conversations would not be as easily distinguished. The eye contact among Abraham, the angel, and the ram, establishes their connection with one another.

The eye contact in the spiritual world is just as important as Caravaggio's use of hands in the physical. Both the angel and Abraham use their hands in strong physical action, while Isaac is helpless against them, with his own hands hidden, and most likely bound, behind him. The way in which Caravaggio incorporates both eye contact and physical touch into the composition, not only allows these two worlds to be understood separately, but also reinforces their presence in the scene. The spiritual is distinguished through eye contact and not physical touch, as the divine realm is not tangible. The physical world, on the other hand, is defined through aggressive action and touch, as physical contact is a very present aspect in the earthly realm.

When examining these two dialogues, one can see how Abraham straddles both worlds, while

Isaac and the ram remain completely within their own spheres. The ram is wholly involved in the spiritual while Isaac is entirely a part of the physical. The ram watches Abraham and the angel and is completely unaware of Isaac, even though they are next to one another. Isaac is also completely unaware of the presence of both the angel and the ram. Instead, Isaac stares out at the viewer and is overwhelmed by his own terror.

The *Sacrifice of Isaac* is significant in Caravaggio's oeuvre as Abraham participates simultaneously in both worlds. By depicting Abraham actively engaged in both dialogues, Caravaggio bridges the spiritual and the physical and creates the hope that human beings have the potential to be active in both of them. Caravaggio is able to represent the tangible presence of the spiritual world in the physical.

When examining Abraham's face, his expression is not easily read or understood. His expression reminds the viewer once again of Abraham's humanity and faith. As Abraham gazes at the angel, it becomes clear that his trust in the will of God is absolute. Looking at his hands, however, there appears to be a hint of uncertainty. Although the angel has come down from heaven to stop Abraham from killing his son, the viewer does not see any hint of relief in Abraham's posture. He still bends over his son, tightly gripping both the knife and Isaac's face, as if ready to proceed with the sacrifice at any moment. With these two conflicting actions of faith in God and brutal physical violence, tension is built up not just in the image itself, but also within the figure of Abraham. Two different parts of his internal self compete with one another, as he calmly interacts with the angel in the spiritual world, and is in the midst of a violent attack in the physical.

In many of his works, Caravaggio focuses mainly on either the spiritual presence or the physical violence within a scene. This is not so in the *Sacrifice of Isaac*. He creates two competing conversations within the piece, as the figure of Isaac struggles alone in the brutal violence of the physical and the angel and the ram are fully present in the faith of the spiritual. Caravaggio further complicates the *Sacrifice of Isaac* by merging these two realms through the figure of Abraham, as he is present in both of them. Abraham links both worlds and plays an important and active role in each. He is able to listen to and express unwavering faith in both the angel and the will of God, while he holds both the knife and his son in violent action, ready to commit a brutal sacrifice.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 261.
- <sup>2</sup> Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), 165-195, 222-234.
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph F Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion." *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (1987), 150.
- <sup>4</sup> John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 78-79.
- <sup>5</sup> Helen Langdon, 180.
- <sup>6</sup> Howard Hibbard, 262.
- <sup>7</sup> Gloria K Fiero, "The Catholic Reformation and the Baroque Style." *Humanistic Tradition Vol. 4: Faith, Reason and Power in the Early Modern World Ch.20* (1997), 515.
- <sup>8</sup> Among art historians, there is a controversy as to which figure within the *Calling of St Matthew* represents Matthew. Many scholars believe that the figure who looks at Christ and gestures with his hand is Matthew, as he is understood to be pointing to himself. Other scholars believe that this figure is pointing towards the man who counts coins with his head down, which would indicate that this figure is Matthew. Through an examination of this work and various texts, such as Hibbard's *Caravaggio*, I have concluded that the figure of Matthew is the man who gestures towards himself, as he engages emotionally and through eye contact with the figure of Christ.
- <sup>9</sup> Howard Hibbard, 126-8.
- <sup>10</sup> Helen Langdon, 195.
- <sup>11</sup> Howard Hibbard, 167.
- <sup>12</sup> *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Genesis 22.1-22.14.
- <sup>13</sup> Helen Langdon, 187.
- <sup>14</sup> Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1989), 44.
- <sup>15</sup> Gilles Lambert, *Caravaggio* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), 82.