

**17th-Century Neapolitan Paintings of the Flagellation of Christ:
Temporality, Pain & Performance**

by

Shalini Mikaela Vanan

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2005
Diploma in Art History, University of British Columbia, 2009

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Abstract

The Biblical narrative of the Flagellation of Christ persisted in visual representations through the medieval and early modern eras when it was replicated in passion plays, illustrated manuals, sculpture and painting. In 17th-century Naples, several variations on the Flagellation scene were produced by artists such as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, Jusepe de Ribera, Bernardo Cavallino, Andrea Vaccaro and Luca Giordano. Because it was the first of a series of images, scholars have often viewed Caravaggio's *Flagellation of Christ* as the model for all succeeding artists. In this thesis I work against this notion choosing instead to focus on the prevalence of three major themes—temporality, pain and performance—through which to consider the series of paintings as a whole. Using an interdisciplinary approach I address the socio-cultural implications of the practice of flagellation and trace it from its roots as a medieval monastic practice to its widespread prominence in 17th-century Naples. In the examination of three different examples of Neapolitan paintings of the Flagellation of Christ, it becomes apparent that these images suggest violence without overtly displaying it. The implicit corporeal mutilation in the paintings relies primarily on the various accouterments of torture. These devices constitute a visual language that expresses pain through their presence—either implied through gestures, or as props—rather than through the depiction of mortification of the skin. This positions pain in the external world where it prompts reflection on the performance of flagellation rather than an individual embodied experience. Considering the 17th-century Neapolitan context, I argue that these paintings participated in a dialogue with communal acts of flagellation that can be seen as performances. Using Gilles Deleuze's notion of 'becoming' as a methodological framework, and considering the social practices of Naples and the revived religious doctrine of the *Imitatio Christi*, I argue that these paintings, considered as a series, constitute repetitive performances of the same subject through the representation of distinctively different temporal moments.

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* Image Not Included, Permission Not Granted

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Introduction

The Flagellation of Christ, though only mentioned in three of the four gospels and described in a single sentence, is one of the most iconic scenes from the Passion cycle, arguably only second to the Crucifixion itself. Where the Crucifixion represents the ultimate sacrifice, the Flagellation is emblematic of the nobility and willingness to suffer. Various depictions of this scene have appeared in illustrated manuals, passion plays, sculpture and painting, through the Middle Ages and into the early modern era. While it is true that the theme persists through the ages, a sudden proliferation of these paintings appears in Naples during the 17th-century. A painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Flagellation of Christ (1607)*, initiated what became a series of paintings of the Flagellation by artists including Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, Jose de Ribera, Bernardo Cavallino, Andrea Vaccaro and Luca Giordano, to list a few. And yet to label this interest in Caravaggio's altarpiece as imitation would not only be reductive but also overlook the specific religious climate within which these images participated. It is my assertion that these artists' treatment of the body of Christ and the depiction of his suffering spoke to broader religious fervor. What is significant in this cluster of paintings is the relationship between the body of Christ and suffering that threads through subsequent paintings of this scene. Through a consideration of these various elements, I will show that these paintings, when viewed as a series, form a sequence of moments in the Flagellation of Christ through which viewers could repeatedly experience the *imitatio Christi*.

Although numerous, these paintings of the Flagellation in Naples have received surprisingly little scholarly attention. While commissioned by various religious orders that were involved with a surge in the practice of flagellation, most of the relevant religious history focuses

on the Jesuit presence in Naples. Thus, my research has been interdisciplinary, and my argument developed from diverse political, social, cultural, theological and art historical sources. Using various philosophical frameworks, this study is a tentative step toward unraveling the complex relationship between the paintings and the cultural context that generated them. Lastly, due to the abundance of these images in Naples, I have opted to focus on paintings of the flagellation of Christ by Ribera, Caravaggio and Cavallino.

The paintings by these artists date to different decades within the 17th-century and represent various demographics in Neapolitan society. These constituencies not only contributed to the ubiquity of the iconography but also to the widespread societal practice of flagellation in Naples. The artists themselves come from different circumstances and have attained varied levels of recognition. Cavallino for instance, who was born in Naples in 1616 and died during the plague of 1656, is less well known. While much of his life has gone undocumented for reasons that will be discussed in chapter two, Cavallino's small cabinet painting of the Flagellation of Christ, unlike the other two examples, reflects the multifunctional aspect of these images. Its modest size and setting also aid in establishing the cross-cultural impact the practice of flagellation had in Naples.

Similarly, much of the Spanish born artist Ribera's early career has remained undocumented. From the little documentation that exists, scholars know that he was born in the Spanish town of Jativa, near Valencia, in 1591 and that he was likely exposed to Italian art from an early age. The years after his birth in Spain were marked by a period of intensified importation of Italian art by the Spanish nobility and court that were captivated by artists such as

Raphael, Titian and Tintoretto.¹ According to one of his early biographers, the physician Giulio Mancini, Ribera married Caterina Azzolino y India, the daughter of a Sicilian painter and settled permanently in Naples. Antonio Palomino, another biographer of Ribera, recounts his acceptance into *The Order of Christ*.² A short document recommending Ribera to Rome written in Neapolitan Italian, signify the importance of the Neapolitan School of Painting and its recognition by Rome and its papal patrons.³ Other documents by Palomino suggest that fellow Neapolitan painters Caracciolo and Massimo Stanzione were also accepted to the same order. While an important artist in his own right, scholars have often associated much of his work with that of Caravaggio, crediting Ribera for his interpretation of Caravaggio's naturalism and chiaroscuro.⁴

Caravaggio is of course well known and born in Milan in 1573. With the death of his father, an architect, he was sent to study under a painter, Simone Peterzano,⁵ before venturing to Rome where he saw unparalleled success under the patronage of several cardinals and the papacy. According to his biographers, on May 28th, 1606, Caravaggio killed Ranuccio Tomassoni in a fatal brawl over a tennis match, forcing the artist into hiding and subsequently to leave Rome for Naples.⁶ It was here under new Neapolitan patronage that Caravaggio painted two versions of

¹ Edward J. Sullivan, "Jusepe de Ribera: An Interpreter of the Skin through Art," *The American Journal of Dermatopathology* 2 (1979): 159.

² Jeanne Chenault, "Jusepe de Ribera and the Order of Christ: New Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 118 (1976): 306.

³ Ibid., 306.

⁴ Ribera has often been cast as one of Caravaggio's followers. For an example see, Richard E. Spear, *Caravaggio and His Followers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 149. or Charles Dempsey, "Caravaggio and the Two Naturalistic Styles: Specular Versus Macular," in *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, ed. Genevieve Warwick (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2006), 96.

⁵ Roberto Longhi, *Caravaggio* (Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1998), 5.

⁶ Genevieve Warwick, *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception* (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2006), 29.

The Flagellation of Christ. As one of the most prolific and influential artists, whose life is well documented, the scholarship on Caravaggio is extensive. Consequentially, my study has also had to address, albeit in limited scope, the vast literature on Caravaggio with its emphasis on biography, style and artistic practice.

Early biographers famously remarked on Caravaggio's irascible and violent temperament. As previously mentioned, the murder charges brought against him have been substantiated by police reports and legal documents. That painters painted themselves, as Leonardo da Vinci observed, was the prevailing line of thought during the early modern era and thus Caravaggio's tendency to paint violent images was correlated to his own bad temper and violent disposition. Though no longer a dominant line of inquiry, such modes of thinking continue to infiltrate modern scholarship.⁷

Recently, however, Thomas Puttfarcken, in his article "Caravaggio and the Representation of Violence," has explored the artist's vast production of violent images to bring forward new insights. He ties Caravaggio's work to his interest in other arts, such as poetry and theatre of the late 16th-century. As he states, "In his pursuit of verisimilitude, of approximation to the truth of nature, Caravaggio even early on seems to me to be trying to push against the limitations of painting as defined by the dramatists, both in terms of silence and of stasis."⁸ Caravaggio's style mediated drama and stillness creating a dramatic pause within his paintings. Drawing on these insights, this thesis shifts the focus from style to the socio-cultural conditions that generated these paintings. According to archival documents, *The Flagellation of Christ* by Caravaggio was commissioned by the de Franchis family in Naples and recorded "in the de Franchis Chapel in

⁷ For example, see Philip Sohm, "Caravaggio's Death," *Art Bulletin* 3 (2002): 449-468.

⁸ Thomas Puttfarcken, "Caravaggio and the Representation of Violence," *Art (Prague)* 3 (2007):193.

San Domenico Maggiore, ”⁹ one of the oldest churches of the Dominican order, and in the center of Naples.¹⁰ In this thesis, I will show that instead of attributing the violent subject matter of the painting to the artist’s temperament, it should be attributed to the interests of the family who commissioned it and to its display in San Domenico Maggiore, a religious order that practiced flagellation. Also important to my study is the evidence of numerous paintings of the theme that attest to wider investments in the subject matter in Naples.

The style of Caravaggio’s works has been a repeated concern in the literature. Louis Marin argues that naturalism is a way of heightening the drama of the scene: “Caravaggio’s gesture reveals a preference not for a death of art but for its appearance or surface.”¹¹ The dark tones create a contraction of space, drawing the viewer to the surface of the image. Engaged in the drama and the sensorium of the moment, this reduction of space functions as a means of creating an affect or sensory reaction.¹² Particularly in the paintings of Caravaggio, according to Marin, the efficacy of gestures was a means with which Caravaggio could abbreviate the narrative as well. He could thus represent the “artificial iconic moments rather than true narrative representations.”¹³ Michael Fried argues that the lack of overt expression, particularly in Passion images of Christ, suggests an internal state of self-reflection. Fried posits that in *The Mocking of Christ* by Caravaggio, Christ is presented in a mode of recognition of the events to come and, in

⁹ Robert Enggass and Jonathan Brown, *Italian and Spanish Art, 1600-1750: Sources and Documents* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 81.

¹⁰ Yoni Ascher, “The Church and the Piazza: Reflections on the South Side of the Church of S. Domenico Maggiore in Naples,” *Architectural History* 45 (2002): 92.

¹¹ Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 108.

¹² Laura Rorato, ““The Colour Of Light”: Caravaggio’s *The Burial of St. Lucy* Revisited by Pino Di Silvestro in La Fuga, La Sosta,” *Romance Studies* 2 (2005):133.

¹³ John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 106.

the larger scheme of things, of acceptance.¹⁴ Caravaggio's method of painting has often been described as creating a sensorium, a mode through which the viewer is implicated in the moment of narration. While my project takes into consideration the formal aspects and content of various paintings of the theme, how they fit into an artist's body of work is not something with which I am concerned. Instead, the focus on the pose, format, and subject matter—particularly the evidential and penitential character of the violent moment—rather than the artist's distinctive style, is something that reverberates through the collection of flagellation paintings as a whole and is what creates a connection between social discourse and visual representation.

In terms of artistic practice, Genevieve Warwick observes that “Caravaggio demonstrated the relevance of the past to his contemporaries by enacting it within the framework of the present.”¹⁵ In regards to his artistic practices, she states that his method was the reenactment of the visual record of tableaux in the artist's studio. Using aspects of early modern theatre that often portrayed religious ritual, contemporary costume in contrast to archeological detail, and scientific instruments such as mirrors and camera obscuras, Caravaggio constructed a performance of the past in his paintings. While artistic practices would contribute to an understanding of how the Flagellation may have been set up in an artist's studio, my concern is not with how Caravaggio and the other artists devised their compositions but instead with the specific historical resonance of the theme. Warwick's idea of performance, therefore, has significant implications for considering the social context of 17th-century Naples, and offers a framework for exploring the relevance of the Flagellation of Christ as a repetition of the past. My

¹⁴ Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 90.

¹⁵ Genevieve Warwick, *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception* (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2006), 19.

argument shifts the emphasis on performance from the staging used by Caravaggio toward the rituals that were enacted in public spaces in Naples. This becomes the platform through which to view the collection of paintings by different artists as different moments in the scene and thus as a series of images.

Lastly on the literature on Caravaggio, my study endeavors to redress the problematic identification of the Neapolitan Caravaggisti as followers of Caravaggio. Because Caravaggio's two paintings of the Flagellation were completed during the beginning of the 17-century, they are often framed as models—the altarpiece from San Domenico Maggiore in particular—for the artworks that followed. For example in the essay “Painting in Naples Between Reality and Fantasy” Nicola Spinosa writes: “it was with the arrival of Caravaggio in Naples that we can begin what modern critics call - with reference to the 17th-century and, perhaps with a certain excessive emphasis in not for clarity of expression - the Golden Age of Neapolitan painting.”¹⁶ He goes on to note that the influence of the Lombard painter, in spite of opposition from local mannerist artists, was extensive, with several painters, including Carlo Sellitto and Battisetello Caracciolo, falling under his spell immediately. It is through the works of these artists that younger artists continued to adopt characteristics of Caravaggio's paintings.¹⁷ Even when discussing Ribera's renewal of naturalism in Naples in 1616, Spinosa mentions that he studied “in Rome with the milieu of the Northern Caravaggesques, and with careful and vigorous emulation, he pushed to solutions of harsh, crude realism, of the most authentic and immediate aspects...”¹⁸ The Caravaggisti/Caravaggesques category creates a bias that frames their paintings

¹⁶ Nicola Spinosa, “Painting in Naples Between Reality and Fantasy” in *Fierce Reality: Italian Masters from Seventeenth Century Naples*, ed. Thomas J. Loughman (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A, 2006), 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸ Ibid., 38.

as subordinate copies that reference Caravaggio's work. It also positions these other artists as derivative and underplays the context within which these images were created. This is a notion that I will work against in this thesis.

Through a contemplation of the relationship between the body of Christ and suffering, I will show that these paintings, when viewed as a series, enact the flagellation of Christ as a sequence of moments through which viewers could repeatedly experience the *imitatio christi* in their devotional practice. Chapter Two of my thesis therefore begins with the history of flagellation as a practice performed as part of the *imitatio Christi* doctrine. Following the move of this practice from private to public and its relevance to a wide socio-political discourse, I argue that the Counter Reformation played a large part in the renewed interest in self-flagellation. This renewed interest migrated into the visual culture of the time, exemplified in this study in paintings of the Flagellation of Christ by Ribera, Caravaggio and Cavallino. Through close visual comparison I show that these paintings, while often described by scholars as similar, can be understood instead as different temporal moments within the event of the Flagellation of Christ.

Chapter Three opens by attending to how visual representations of the Flagellation of Christ changed over time from narrative to emotive concerns. I argue that the emphasis on the Eucharist during the Counter Reformation was another reason why these paintings focused more on the body than on the narrative of the story. I then move to visual representations of pain and the absence of blood in this group of images. Lastly, through a philosophical discussion of pain as experienced internally and expressed externally, I show that it is not the interior sensation of

pain in an individual that was important, but the outward expression of pain that was relevant for visual imagery.

In the Fourth and final Chapter, I explore the history of the religious orders in Naples in the late 16th and 17th centuries. I relate this ecclesiastical dominance to the production of churches and paintings. I address the various ways in which the practice of flagellation was conducted in the public arena of Naples and how that permeated visual imagery. Finally, I explore ritual through performance theory. Through an examination of ritual and how that relates to individuals and their identity, I show that the act of viewing a painting is in fact ritualistic in the context of 17th-century Naples and thus was a means of abiding by the doctrine of *imitatio Christi*.

In my conclusion, I employ Giles Deleuze's theory of difference and repetition, to link these various aspects of temporality, pain and performance, showing that the various paintings of the flagellation of Christ were a series of events or moments. This series, rather than being structured by a model/copy dynamic originating with Caravaggio's work, is better understood as a sequence of events that were generated out of a socio-political discourse that pervaded 17th-century Naples.

2 Temporality

2.1 History of Flagellation & Religious Practice

The Flagellation of Christ by Ribera, c.1617 (Fig.1.), was one of the earliest works completed by the painter upon his arrival in Naples. Unlike many of his previous commissions in Rome, Ribera's Neapolitan paintings, including *The Flagellation*, show a greater emphasis on religious subject matter, in particular the naked, suffering body of Christ and the cruelty inflicted upon him. This thematic change towards representing more religious subjects, as will be shown, is indicative of the new patronage he encountered in Naples. *The Flagellation of Christ* was commissioned for the Church of St. Fillippo Neri di Girolamini, which was constructed in the late 16th-century.

Ribera's *Flagellation* is an ominous representation that focuses on the suffering of Christ through subtle emotive means instead of overt violence. The background of the painting is immersed in darkness creating a morose ambiance that also forces the viewer's eye on the foreground where the body of Christ, a presumed assailant and the column reside. In most preceding versions of this scene, the column of the flagellation is almost always a key component in the narrative composition. However, Ribera has elected to shroud the classical Roman column in darkness, relegating it to the background. Negating what is usually an important narrative element in the scene intensifies the emphasis on the body of Christ. Rather than distract the viewers with narrative elements such as the column or the scourge, the weapon used to inflict torture, Ribera has opted to create a somber, internalized and self-reflective interpretation. Christ is dressed in a loin cloth and gazes gravely towards the floor. The

luminescence of the figure's torso beckons the viewer's gaze and denotes the focal point in the painting.

The facial expression of Christ's suffering alludes to the impending violence. Christ's eyes are closed with his head tilted toward the ground. His lips seem pursed and his facial expression seems to almost convey a sense of resolution to his fate. His body is hunched awkwardly and his hands are positioned over the column. There are ropes entwined around his wrist and, upon closer inspection, there are visible signs of physical incarceration. The redness of his skin around the ropes is in stark contrast to the paleness of the rest of his body. The figure to his right is fully dressed in a garment that was a contemporary garb of the early 17th-century. The sleeves of his shirt are a crimson red that in a foreboding manner reminds the viewer of the blood about to be shed. He is bent over staring aggressively at Christ's face. His right hand disappears into the darkness while his left hand appears at the bottom right of the image. Even though there is no sign of the scourge, the traditional instrument of torture and a common element of this scene, the clenched fist is a subtle clue as to the motivations of this figure to the right of Christ. Rather than overtly confront the viewer in *The Flagellation*, Ribera precludes the violence of the scene, instead opting to paint the moment prior to the act. Through this, he elicits a heightened anticipatory engagement with the image while capitalizing on the familiarity with the Passion story that contemporary viewers would have had.

The Passion of Christ is a central component of Christian theology. It is derived from all four of the Gospels and tells the story of Jesus' physical, mental, emotional and spiritual suffering. It begins with a plot against Jesus by the Jewish priests and continues to his crucifixion. Though it has become an iconic scene in the Passion, the Flagellation of Christ is

mentioned in only three of the four Gospels and surprisingly limited to one sentence in each text.

For example, according to the Gospel of Saint Mark (15:15):

“ And so Pilate, being willing to satisfy the people, released to them Barabbas: and delivered up Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.”¹⁹

This sentence describing the torture not only lacks descriptive elements but is also devoid of any emotional response from Christ. The reader is left to infer the violence and psychological complexities. However, what is mentioned in the sentence is the scourging of Christ, a practice that in the Roman era was a common method of corporal punishment. The scourge, a whip equipped with knotted rope, was the preferred instrument of torture used to repeatedly lash the bodies of the condemned. This was the recorded form of torture Jesus received prior to his death. Preoccupation with the final moments of Jesus’ life, in particular the emphasis on his acceptance of pain and suffering, form the fundamental beginnings of the monastic tradition of self-flagellation. During the early medieval era, monastic orders incorporated flagellation as a form of self-inflicted corporal punishment because they believed that the imitation of Christ could redeem the sinner.²⁰

The primary focus of Christianity is the life, death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus. According to the bible, the Apostle Paul is said to have uttered the words, “in Christ,” “through Christ” and “be imitators of Christ” to the disciples of Jesus.²¹ He goes on to say, “become imitators of me as I am of Christ,” thereby establishing himself as the norm of Christian

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible: The Catholic Bible Doway- Rheims Version* (New York: Beziger Brothers, 1941)

²⁰ Niklaus Largier, *In Praise of the Whip* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 77.

²¹ Robert Samuel Dannals, “Aspects of Imitatio Christi in the Moral Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer” (PhD. diss., Graduate Theological Foundation, 2005).

behavior, and further articulating the principle that Christians should strive to mimic Christ.²²

At the core of this concept is the notion that through the emulation of Christ's life and work, one can participate in his being. Jesus is presented to the world as the one through whom salvation for all can be achieved. However, more importantly, he is the physical embodiment of the abstracted idea of God and, through his actions and teachings, provides a model for his followers.²³ By extension: through the practice of repetition the disciples are granted saving grace, not simply for being created "in the image of Christ" but through a practice of their own volition and personhood since they choose to imitate his life and lessons.²⁴

The doctrine of *imitatio Christi* governs the relationship of the individual, his acts, ethics and connection to God. It also situates Jesus Christ as an agent of salvation who provides the model for Christian replication. Positioning Jesus as a figure who himself replicates the abstraction of God, allows for a model of application. It also privileges all acts in the life of Jesus, particularly those associated with the salvation of mankind. Thus, the Passion is propelled to the top of the hierarchical structure of Christian beliefs. In the case of flagellation, the pagan method of inflicting torture onto bodies was appropriated as a model of exemplary behavior that Christians are to imitate to show their faith in God.²⁵

Early Christian emperors adopted the Roman legal system thus inheriting scourging as a punishment. In the early medieval era, Christian monasteries functioned as educational

²² A.K.M Adam, "Walk This Way: Repetition, Difference and the Imitation of Christ," *Interpretation* 55 (2001): 22.

²³ Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44-46.

²⁴ Dannals, "Aspects of *Imitatio Christi* in the Moral Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

²⁵ Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 45.

laboratories intended to transform the souls of monks and nuns. Since willing obedience and humility were the key to Christian transformation, punishment became indispensable.²⁶ Consequently, monastic orders of the early Middle Ages adopted flagellation as a form of punishment.²⁷ During these sessions, the blows delivered to those who required atonement continued until blood poured from the tears in the skin. The 11th- and 12th-centuries saw flagellation as a punishment displaced by self-flagellation as a spiritual practice.²⁸ This entailed the repeated whipping of oneself, in private and by one's own hand. Peter Damian, a 11th-century church reformer and cardinal of Italy in *De laude flagellorium*, spoke of self-flagellation as a useful form of purification and repentance. According to his text, the submission to the whip was seen as a spiritual *imitatio Christi*, "a way to engage the body and the imagination in the task of communicating with God."²⁹ This ritualistic and repetitive act, according to Niklaus Largier, was seen as "part of an eschatological drama performed within human life and aiming at the bodily presence of the suffering of Christ."³⁰ In other words, through the repeated enactment of the suffering of Christ, followers believed that they could replicate his presence within themselves.

Self-flagellation as a public event did not begin until the 13th century when it was encouraged by Raniero Fasani, a layman and member of the penitential brotherhood. Fasani was responding to economic uncertainty, wars, epidemics and the expectation of the Apocalypse

²⁶ J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann, eds., *Religions of the World: Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 1119.

²⁷ Largier, *In Praise of the Whip*, 77.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁹ Melton and Baumann, eds., *Religions of the World: Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, 1120.

³⁰ Largier, *In Praise of the Whip*, 79.

when he founded the first flagellant movement in Perugia. This movement entered Italy through a peace procession in Bologna in 1260.³¹ However, it was not until the outbreak of the plague in 1348 that flagellation became a widespread cultural practice in Europe. The plague of 1348, also referred to as the Black Death, was seen as a punishment from God as a result of human sinfulness. Responses to the plague of 1348 are well documented, taking on variations of the flagellant movement and including the persecution of foreign ethnic groups, such as the Jews, and a preoccupation with impending doom.³² The flagellant movement was based on a belief that the mortification of the flesh was a means by which humans could erase their sins. Essentially, the flagellators were attempting to placate God's anger through the ritualistic act of whipping themselves. In other mystical practices such as the devotion to the process of meditation, the image of Christ and his wounds were only visualized.³³ However through the physical reenactment of Christ's suffering, flagellators were attempting to physically identify themselves with Christ. Moreover they were trying to atone for their perceived sins through this redemptive act and to unite themselves with the Grace of God.³⁴

The procession of flagellators was a monumental event that brought viewers and participants together from across the social spectrum. The viewing of the flagellation ceremony was regarded as a redemptive moment that brought health and salvation. As Friedmann Kreuder writes, "Flagellation should therefore be regarded as a ritual performance in which the meaning

³¹ Ibid., 105.

³² Michael W. Dols, "The Comparative Communal Responses to the Black Death in Muslim and Christian Societies", *Viator* 5 (1974): 273.

³³ Friedemann Kreuder, "Flagellation of the Son of God and Divine Flagellation: Flagellator Ceremonies and Flagellation Scenes in the Medieval Passion Play," *Theatre Research International* 2 (2008): 181.

³⁴ Ibid., 181.

of Scripture was directly transferred to self-perception, into emotion and imagination and into the physical dramatization of the story of salvation.”³⁵ He proposes that because the efficacy of the practice reached beyond the scope of the flagellator and redeemed the witnesses to the event, each flagellator could potentially have a redemptive quality as a second Christ.

This practice was “a collective *imitatio Christi*,” as Norman Cohn explains, “a redemptive sacrifice which protected the world from final overwhelming catastrophe, and by virtue of which they themselves [the flagellants] became a holy elite.”³⁶ The procession of lay penitents marched through the various Italian towns, flagellating themselves to expiate the sins of humankind. These penitents were encouraged by mendicant orders, but they were lay directed and administratively autonomous. These groups soon formed confraternities that took on two forms, the *laudesi*, and the *battuti*, or *disciplinati*. The latter of the two practiced self-flagellation as a penitential imitation of Christ’s suffering.³⁷ It is important to note that the practice of flagellation was not uniformly met with favor. In 1349, Pope Clement VI condemned the movement citing heretical tendencies and disorderly behavior by those involved.³⁸ Without the Church’s support self-flagellation soon died out in Northern Italy but was continued by the laity in Naples as a means of dealing with the difficulties of daily life.³⁹

The Catholic reformation of the 16th century saw a resurgence of self-flagellation. The Counter Reformation saw the reiteration of practices that engaged fundamental Christian

³⁵ Ibid., 181

³⁶ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, rev. ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 142.

³⁷ Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole AHL, *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

³⁸ John A. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements* (California: Altamira Press, 2003), 54.

³⁹ Jennifer D. Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuit Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 50.

theology such as the *imitatio Christi*, now taken firmly under the control of the church. The ritualization of flagellation as the fundamental externalization of this doctrine thereby gained renewed importance, most notably in the south of Italy. Naples in particular was a city where the practice flourished not only because of both the Spanish occupation and also because of the competing religious orders. The Jesuits in their missions to Naples, were famously dedicated to their practice of self-flagellation. During their revivalist missions to the South, they attempted to reinvigorate the practice by amalgamating local traditions and Jesuit theology. It was at this point that the practice took on apocalyptic character only previously experienced during the Black Death. A description of a Jesuit rural mission in 1630 reported that “those who beat themselves with iron chains, far from turning red with a lot of blood, actually turned white as their bones were revealed through lacerated flesh.”⁴⁰ The topic of Naples and the religious practices of the various orders is an issue I will return to in Chapter Four of this thesis. However at this point I will establish a correlation between the Counter Reformation and types of images produced, and consequently why paintings of the flagellation of Christ became commonplace in Naples.

2.2 The Counter Reformation & Changing Visual Representations

In the 16th-century the Catholic Church was confronted by mounting pressures resulting from the northern Protestant Reformation. Reformers made allegations about the abuse of power and funds, deviation from Scripture and misuse of sacred imagery. The Council of Trent was one of the major councils in which the Catholic Church reasserted theological doctrine through legislation. Operating in three separate stages, the Council met intermittently over eighteen

⁴⁰ Robert A Schneider, “Mortification on Parade: Penitential Processions in sixteenth and seventeenth Century France,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 10 (1986): 133.

years. Though it was originally proclaimed as a forum for the Protestants and Catholics to voice their concerns, it soon became apparent that the Church was intent on focusing its attention on the Catholic institution.⁴¹ This turn towards affirming the more conservative theological doctrines was paramount in the Counter Reformation launched by the Church as a response to Protestant attacks.⁴² The decrees, on ratification in 1564, were accepted by all states within Italy.⁴³ Through the three stages of the Council, the discussion and decision making took on two main strands: first, the theological definitions, teachings and doctrine to counter heresy, and second, the reorganization of the Church, the conduct of its members and the reform of abuses.⁴⁴

The misuse of sacred imagery in particular was a huge concern for the Protestants. They were anxious that people were confusing imagery with the divine and that this veered on the side of idolatry.⁴⁵ Within the Catholic faith however, sacred imagery was a vital part of practicing faith. Not only was it a visual reference to the Christian Doctrine but it was also an emotive tool for stimulating piety. Hence, when it became apparent that the Catholic Church was no longer interested in any form of reconciliation with the Protestants, they produced a series of treatises on the arts which included arguments previously used by earlier theologians in the iconoclastic struggles of the medieval era.⁴⁶ Rhetoric from earlier Church Fathers, such as Gregory the

⁴¹ On the Counter Reformation there are many sources. See for example, Michael Mullett, *The Catholic Reformation* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁴² Christopher Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19

⁴³ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 23

⁴⁵ Bryan D. Mangrum and Giuseppe Scavizzi, ed., *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emser and Ect on Scared Images/ Three Treatises in Translation* (Toronto: The Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1991), 1 -18.

⁴⁶ Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 107.

Great's descriptions of religious paintings as "the Bible of the illiterate" appear frequently in the writings of the later 16th-century.⁴⁷

During the 25th session of the Council of Trent, on December 3rd and 4th 1563, under Pius IV, the *Decree on Touching the invocation, veneration, and on relics of saints, and sacred imagery* not only established the difference between idolatry and the veneration of images, but also redefined the aims of images as being a mode of instructing and inciting piety in believers.⁴⁸ Hence, images had to be intelligible so that the illiterate would easily recognize them. They were not to have obscure, ambiguous or complex meanings in order to avoid confusion or misinterpretation. Essentially, these treatises were a set of guidelines for artists in their production of all future works. Not only did this steer artists towards more traditional representational models but also discouraged esoteric artistic experimentations in form that would obscure meaning.⁴⁹ Many Catholic churches were designed and refurbished with images in accordance with a general attempt to create a visual spectacle that would not only capture the attention of viewers but also allow them an emotional experience and thus bring them into communion with God.⁵⁰ The Council of Trent appointed the bishops to enforce the application of these decrees on images.⁵¹ Violators of these decrees were brought before a tribunal by the Holy Office. In one of the more famous cases, Paolo Veronese was put on trial for a work he painted for the convent of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. He was charged not for his infidelity to the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ Theodore Alois Buckley, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London: George Routledge and Co., 1851), 213-216.

⁴⁹ Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art, 1500-1600: Sources and Documents* (Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1966), 120.

⁵⁰ Beth Williamson, *Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

⁵¹ Klein and Zerner, *Italian Art, 1500-1600: Sources and Documents*, 124.

text but for his lack of decorum in the picturesque accessories and for painting an obscure image.⁵² As a result, his painting of the Last Supper for the refectory of the convent was later renamed *Feast at the House of Levi*. This incident not only demonstrates the reach of the Catholic Church's authority but also its desire to dictate the types of images produced. The Church necessitated that these images were to reflect Christian principles that were worthy of imitation. More than merely illustrating Christian subject matter with clarity, art was used as a didactic tool. Its potential to create an empathetic response not only allowed viewers to visualize a tangible emblem of their faith, but also provided a means through which to develop a connection to the divine.

The 5th and 6th sessions of the Council of Trent instituted some of the most important doctrinal resolutions including original sin and justification.⁵³ Disputing ideas of the early theologian Pelagius, C. 400AD, who argued that individuals had the capacity through their own free will and good work to attain forgiveness and redemption, St Augustine eliminated free will entirely, stressing the importance of God's saving grace and the redemptive qualities of Christ crucified.⁵⁴ This Augustinian thought and reliance on the Cross of Christ rather than one's own merits was attractive to many during the Counter Reformation years including pious Italian Catholics such as Michelangelo Buonarroti, Vittoria Colonna, Cardinal Contarini and Naples-based Spaniard Juan de Valdes.⁵⁵ Cardinal Contarini, who famously negotiated a doctrinal truce over justification with the Lutherans, posthumously contributed his intellectual legacy, bringing

⁵² Ibid., 129.

⁵³ Michael A Mullett, *Catholic Reformation* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 42.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 42

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43

forth Augustinian ideas to the Council of Trent. The Council, in the *Decree Concerning Justification* of the 6th session on 13 January 1547 concluded that sinners were redeemed not through their own good works but through the merits of Christ. The Council “resolved the doctrine of salvation not in a spirit of confidence in human capacity to achieve salvation by free will through good works but rather with a trust in saving grace apprehended in faith.”⁵⁶ This decree consequentially, led to the reinforcement of acts of faith, in particular the emphasis on the Eucharist and the practice of flagellation, both of which were seen as acts solidifying an individual’s faith in Christ.

Following the *Decree on Justification*, the Council of Trent reconvened to discuss the importance of the Eucharist and the doctrine of Transubstantiation. During the 13th session of the Council of Trent, under Pope Julius III, 11th October 1551, the council debated the Real Presence of God in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, concluding that in the Holy Communion believers partaking in the consumption of bread and wine received “The Body of Christ.”⁵⁷ Thomas à Kempis, a 15th-century priest and scribe provided specific instructions for readers in his book *The Imitation of Christ*, circulated first in 1418 and perhaps the most influential Christian text after the Bible. The Eucharist is singled out as being an essential element of spiritual life.⁵⁸ Believers were encouraged to partake in the ritualized receiving of the Sacrament. This act was a ritual through which the faithful could replicate God within themselves and thus be redeemed. This line of thought was fundamentally opposed to Protestant tenants and reiterated in the *Decree on the Real Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most*

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44

⁵⁷ Buckley, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 70-79.

⁵⁸ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton, eds. Paul Negri and Susan L. Rattiner (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 132.

Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, where the Mass was reinforced; no mere commemorative act, it was also a representation of Christ's Passion. Thus the Eucharist, like the act of flagellation, was another means of participating in the doctrine of *imitatio Christi* and demonstrating one's faith in God.

In ceremonies, the Eucharistic devotions were greatly emphasized through presentation and display, not only on altars but also through processions that Carlo Borromeo, archbishop of Milan, encouraged.⁵⁹ Borromeo's involvement in religious reform was seen by contemporaries, and by scholars, as emblematic of Counter Reformation values. Wieste de Boer presents a cogent account of what he deems "an extraordinary social experiment," where Borromeo "launched a concerted and full scale effort to transform the social order by reaching into the consciences of its subjects."⁶⁰ Borromeo employed dictatorial controls, fought against heresy, implemented the Trent recommendations and above all else was renowned for his piety and asceticism. The renewed emphasis on the Passion and consequently the doctrine of *imitatio Christi* established flagellation as an emblematic practice. Moreover, it found a new champion in the archbishop. It is well documented that he subjected himself to an ascetic regime of fasting, flagellation and mortifications and expected others to do so as well.⁶¹ Upon his death, his body during funeral preparations was said to have borne scars of violent self-mortification. The connection between the Eucharist and flagellation is an issue I will return to in Chapter Three.

⁵⁹ Christopher Black "The Public Face of Post - Tridentine Italian Confraternities," *The Journal of Religious History* 1 (2004): 89.

⁶⁰ Wietse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul* (Boston: Brill, 2001): ix.

⁶¹ Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy*, 69.

2.3 Images of the Flagellation of Christ in Naples

The renewed emphasis on the Eucharist, that I will take up in more depth in the next chapter, coupled with the almost tyrannical drive by church leaders and the decree on artistic production, led to subject matter such as the lives of the saints and scenes from the Passion being taken up in greater frequency than in the past. Naples, like the other states in Italy, followed these decrees and experienced heightened religious fervor due to the driving force of the new religious orders that sprung out of the Counter Reformation. These orders, particularly in Naples, competed with each other for the devotion of the people and were prominent in the role of reform ideas and spiritual practices. They were also patrons of the arts. Using ornate Church buildings and paintings by acclaimed artists, such as Ribera, they exerted their dominance and expressed their spiritual ideas and practices. This is a topic that will be the focus of Chapter Three of this thesis. Considering the religious climate of the post Counter Reformation era and the rival orders that existed in Naples, it is not surprising that the practice of flagellation gained momentum previously only experienced in the medieval era. Hence it is also not surprising that images of the flagellation of Christ became ubiquitous. Undoubtedly the most famous of these 17th-century Flagellation images was produced by Caravaggio in 1607.

Due to his acclaim, upon his arrival in Naples, Caravaggio immediately found new patronage and was commissioned to begin work on the *Seven Works of Mercy*. Archival documents support Giovanni Bellori's suggestion that, along with the *Seven Works of Mercy*, Caravaggio also painted two versions of the Flagellation, *The Flagellation of Christ* and *Christ at the Column*, during the first leg of his Neapolitan visit.⁶² *The Flagellation of Christ*, painted in

⁶² Ibid., 30.

1607 (Fig 2.), was commissioned by the de Franchis family for their Chapel in San Domenico Maggiore,⁶³ one of the oldest Dominican Churches in the epicenter of Naples.⁶⁴ The de Franchis family belonged to the upper nobility of the city and used its power to advance its social standing and expand its estates.⁶⁵ In 1602, Tommaso de Franchis, who commissioned the painting, was given the chapel in San Domenico Maggiore by Don Fernando Gonzaga. The chapel was already in use in 1624 when he was buried there.⁶⁶ However in 1635 the chapel underwent expansion and renovation, including the unification of two chapels to enlarge the space, the inclusion of variegated marble columns, statues, and extensive decoration that made it the richest and most ornate chapel in the entire church.⁶⁷ When completed in 1652, it was renamed *The Chapel of the Flagellation of the Lord*, and the painting was re-installed.⁶⁸ Up until the early 20th century it remained within the Church, however it was frequently moved from chapel to chapel, which complicated efforts to document its early history. It currently resides in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte.

When Bellori saw the painting in its new setting in 1661 he was “profoundly struck by it,”⁶⁹ recording *The Flagellation* at the top of his list of Neapolitan works, an impression often repeated by subsequent visitors. Recent scholarship has dealt with issues of dating, Caravaggio’s

⁶³ Robert Enggass and Jonathan Brown, *Italian and Spanish Art, 1600-1750: Sources and Documents* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 81.

⁶⁴ Yoni Ascher, “The Church and the Piazza: Reflections on the South Side of the Church of S. Domenico Maggiore in Naples,” *Architectural History* 45 (2002): 92.

⁶⁵ Vincenzo Pacelli, “New Documents concerning Caravaggio in Naples,” *The Burlington Magazine* 897 (1977): 820.

⁶⁶ Lorenza Mochi Onori, “The Flagellation of Christ” in *Caravaggio*, ed. Claudio Strinati (Milano: Skira Editore S.p.A, 2010), 196.

⁶⁷ Pacelli, “New Documents concerning Caravaggio in Naples,” 824.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 824.

⁶⁹ Onori, “The Flagellation of Christ” in *Caravaggio*, 196.

models, structural layout, and sources. A long list of potential influences includes paintings of the *Flagellation* in the Church of Santa Prassede, attributed to Giulio Romano, the fresco of *Christ at the Column* by Sebastiano del Piombo in San Pietro in Montorio, the *Flagellation* by Federico Zuccari in the Gonfalone Oratory, Titian's *Christ at the Column* and, not surprisingly, antique sculpture.⁷⁰ I repeat this scholarly concern with sources not to identify those passages in Caravaggio's painting and thus reconstruct his intentions, but rather because this complex visual canon provides a structure or syntax from which a new modality of representation emerges, one that underplays meaning and narrative elements and puts emphasis primarily on evoking emotion. I also repeat this to counter the arguments often made by scholars who suggest that Caravaggio's painting was a model copied by Neapolitan painters. While this is undoubtedly an important painting in the group, it is necessary to contextualize it as one of many, each of which is an artistic interpretation of an important scene in the Bible and an expression of a larger cultural moment.

Caravaggio's somber *Flagellation* (Fig 2.), like Ribera's version, has few narrative elements with the exception of the column, Christ, and the three figures that surround him. Similar to Ribera, Caravaggio creates an eerie atmosphere through his characteristically blackened background with merely a faint outline of the column, recognizable only by its illuminated base placed directly behind the central figure of Christ, who wears a crown of thorns and a modest loin cloth. The body of Christ catches the light source directly as though the light were emanating from his torso instead of being cast upon it. The only visual clue that we receive suggesting an external light source is the concentration of light on the crouching figure in front

⁷⁰ Ibid., 198.

of Christ. This figure is bent over picking up a scourge that while partially out of frame is identifiable. The attentiveness of his gaze towards the body of Christ suggests the directionality of the instrument of torture. The figure on the right is depicted holding Christ's hands behind him, his legs are awkwardly in motion suggesting that he has kicked the back of Christ's knee. The figure of Christ responds by twisting his body while his face is turned down towards the ground. The figure to the left grabs Christ by the hair with one hand, and in the other, holds another implement for torture. Unlike other renditions of the gospel story, Caravaggio provided the tormentors with human expressions rather than conventional generic masks. That Caravaggio used live models for his work has been the subject of much scholarship.⁷¹

It is important to note that when Ribera arrived in Naples in 1616, Caravaggio had already died and his painting had not yet been installed on the altar at San Domenico Maggiore. As it was held in a private space by the family, and not on public display until much later in the 17th century, Ribera may not have had access to viewing this painting. In the image, Ribera has chosen a single tormentor and has shrouded the classical column in darkness with only the briefest hint of its silhouette. Ribera's painting crops most of Christ's body to emphasize the torso and its luminous quality. Moreover, Ribera's image depicts a moment prior to the actual event. Caravaggio's image on the other hand, is of a different moment entirely. While not yet whipped by the scourge, Christ has been kicked behind the knee. Also, where Ribera's image focuses on the suffering and internal reflection of Christ, Caravaggio's painting converges on the dynamic action and drama of the scene.

⁷¹ Caravaggio's practice of using live models is widely written about. See for example, John L Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 7. or Larry Keith, "Three Paintings by Caravaggio," *National Technical Bulletin* 19 (1998):41.

Very little is known about the artist Cavallino; unlike the Florentines, Romans and Venetians, Neapolitans were not as fortunate in having biographers. Moreover Cavallino worked almost exclusively in the cabinet picture tradition, producing easel paintings and devotional pictures for private chapels and collections, a tradition that often went undocumented.⁷² There are three known versions of the Flagellation of Christ by Cavallino, the best documented being a small picture that may or may not have been originally conceived in an octagonal format. Cavallino's *Flagellation* is painted on coarsely woven canvas and currently displayed at the Galleria Falanga in Naples. *The Flagellation* (Fig.3), dated to the 1630s, has usually been considered a pendant to a companion piece of an known artist, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds*, also octagonal and displayed at Galleria Falanga. The fact that they do not complement each other well suggests that this may be a later conjuncture as opposed to an original design.⁷³ Curators have suggested that it is characteristic of the artist's early dark manner, beginning in the 1630s. Cavallino's version is similar to Caravaggio's painting, although it is important to note that Caravaggio's painting was not in situ in the de Franchis Chapel in the Church of San Domenico Maggiore until towards the end of Cavallino's life. This also underscores the vast difference between the three painters in their approach to the same subject matter. While Ribera's and Caravaggio's paintings are monumental altarpieces, Cavallino's is a small image that bears little functional connection to the other two. Also relevant is the composition of this image in contrast to the other two. Cavallino depicts Christ in the middle of the composition tied to a half column much like that featured in Ribera's painting. Christ's torso

⁷² Ann Percy, "Introduction" in *Bernardo Cavallino of Naples 1616-1656*, ed.s Ann T Laurie and Ann Percy (Ohio: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1984), 1.

⁷³ Ibid., 79.

is bent over and his hands are tied. Unlike Ribera's painting, Cavallino surrounds Christ with tormentors who are about to whip him with a scourge. These shadowy figures emerge from the darkness of the background suggesting their peripheral and secondary importance in the structure of the image. Christ's feet are awkwardly positioned and his torso tilts towards the column giving the impression of a swaying body. Christ's face is tilted towards the viewer and his expression is grim. At the bottom right of the painting, there is an onlooker that one might assume to be Pontius Pilate. In this painting by Cavallino, as in the other two examples, Christ's torso is illuminated suggesting that the body of Christ takes precedence over the narrative.

In considering these examples of the Flagellation, it bears underlining the different ways in which the event is given visual form. Also noteworthy are the different functions—altarpieces and cabinet painting—for which the subject matter was used. Moreover, none of these images actually focus on the scourging itself an issue I address in the following chapter. Lastly, these images were commissioned by different patrons of various religious orders, a topic to which I return in Chapter Four. To conclude this chapter I would like to suggest that each artist's interpretation of the event was based on different temporal moments of the same event. Ribera's painting portrayed the moment that Christ had just been tied to the column. Caravaggio depicted the moment where Christ had just been kicked behind the knee as indicated by his swaying body. Lastly, Cavallino's image presents a moment that occurred just before the first blows were delivered. Hence these paintings can be seen as a sequence of moments that transpired during the larger temporal event of the flagellation of Christ.

Chapter 3 Pain

3.1 Focusing on the Body of Christ

The paintings by Ribera, Caravaggio, and Cavallino (Figs. 1, 2, 3), though they portray different moments within the actual event of the flagellation of Christ, share a similar focus on the body. In each of the images, the artists have articulated a particular emphasis on the body of Christ by juxtaposing the luminosity of the torso with the engulfing darkness in the background. Though chiaroscuro was a technique used by earlier artists, scholars have often credited Caravaggio with perfecting it. His use of tenebrism is a result of intense research into lighting and optics developed over several decades.⁷⁴ Caravaggio's ability to use this technique to heighten the drama of an image inspired a long list of artists. While it must be acknowledged that his work often features a certain finesse that other painters rarely possess, to focus solely on the differences and similarities between the various painting styles employed by the artists understates the criticality of what these images convey. Instead, technique should be viewed as a vehicle for religious experience. This technique, in combination with religious subject matter, adds gravity to an image, inciting a religious experience in a viewer.

In this chapter, I focus on the subject matter of the paintings of the flagellation of Christ. More specifically, I connect the focus on the body of Christ in these images to the theological debates on the Eucharist that occurred during the Counter Reformation. Related to this discussion is the fact that paintings of the flagellation of Christ in 17th-century Naples are absent of blood. The importance of blood and the negation of it in the images requires contemplation of the issue of pain. If viewers are not confronted with overt violence such as scenes of blood shed,

⁷⁴ Pacelli, "New Documents concerning Caravaggio in Naples," 826.

how is pain expressed in images? To answer this question and to conclude the chapter, I engage in a theoretical discussion on pain as an individual experience and as a public spectacle. This theoretical exploration will provide the basis for understanding the cultural conventions and viewing practices of the flagellation in Naples, a topic I will address in the next chapter.

Before addressing more theoretical issues, it is important to highlight the difference in the 17th-century Neapolitan paintings of the flagellation of Christ in comparison with their predecessors. To stress this difference, an examination of one of the most famous representations of the flagellation scene, Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation of Christ*, C.1458 (Fig.4), is useful. This painting by Piero, was a well known image of the Flagellation during the early modern period and an image with which Caravaggio, Ribera and Cavallino would have been familiar. The composition of Piero's *Flagellation* is noticeably divided into two groups of figures, three in the foreground and five in the background. The group in the foreground recalls the scene commonly depicted in the narrative representations of the Jews and Pharisees. In the background, we see Pilate, the judge, seated on his throne. Christ is tied to a column and two men are in the act of whipping him with a scourge. The architectural setting is clearly inside a palace. The background and foreground scenes are juxtaposed but they are psychologically and physically separated.⁷⁵ By creating a disjuncture in the image, Piero is creating a narrative by first ensuring that every element within the image contributes to the overall message and second that all the elements necessary for understanding the message are to be found within the painting.⁷⁶ The form and content work together as a harmonious unit to tell the story of the

⁷⁵ Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca: The Flagellation* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1972), 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

Flagellation. Elements such as the palace backdrop, the various characters, and the two separate scenes come together as events within the narrative of the Passion.

Piero's *Flagellation*, when contrasted with the works by Caravaggio, Ribera and Cavallino, shows an incontestable emphasis on narrative clarity. The 17th-century paintings utilize the chiaroscuro technique to produce an emotive work rather than a narrative one. The darkened background of the paintings insists that the viewer's eye continually return to the foreground. This contraction of space puts an emphasis on the figures located in the foreground. The use of lighting and optical effects illuminates the body of Christ. This luminosity of the torso radiates light giving the impression of a celestial presence. The glistening skin of Christ accentuates and hints at his divinity while calling to attention a body that is unscathed. The incandescent body of Christ, unmarred by violence, almost entices the scourging and obliteration of the skin. The other figures in the image are used to frame and dramatize the principal figure of Christ. They recede into the darkness thereby adding to their function as menacing figures. Rather than confront viewers with overt brutality, violence is implied in these examples of the *Flagellation* through the subtle clues imbedded within the images that allude to the event that is about to transpire. Of course, the painters could rely on the fact that the audience was very familiar with the details of the Passion story, especially since this had been reemphasized during the Counter Reformation. The viewer would have recognized not only the scene but also how these works differed from earlier narrative examples, such as Piero's *Flagellation*, and also from each other. The Neapolitan paintings adhered to expectations for art promoted by the Counter Reformation. Intended as tools for mediation, these paintings were accordingly concerned with the suffering of Christ. This raises a few very important questions. First, if these paintings were

intended to be a mechanism for contemplation on the suffering of Christ and thus the *imitatio Christi*, why do they feature an unscathed body of Christ? Also, why are these images predicated on moments that occur before and not during the actual flagellation of Christ? Before I address these two fundamental questions, it is necessary to understand the striking importance of the body of Christ in these Neapolitan paintings within a context of renewed emphasis on the Eucharist during the Counter Reformation.

3.2 The Eucharist and Transubstantiation

During the Reformation, Protestants argued against the Real Presence in the Eucharist. The subject of the Eucharist became a major tenant of the 1550-51 sessions of the Council of Trent leading to the crucial decree on Transubstantiation:

“That through consecration of the bread and wine there comes about a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And this conversion is by the Holy Catholic Church conveniently and properly called Transubstantiation.”⁷⁷

This decree led to a renewal of past positions on the Eucharist. The Council reinforced the view that the Mass was a representation of Christ’s passion and not just a commemorative act.⁷⁸ Those who were present at Mass would receive mercy and would be pardoned of their sins. The Host came to be emphasized, and displayed on an altar separated from the laity, and glorified as a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice. In Christian eschatology, the Eucharist is a formative dimension of the celebration of God. The New Testament lays out several meal events in the ministry of Jesus,

⁷⁷ Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy*, 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

describing these experiences as “dining in the Kingdom of God.”⁷⁹ Hence, the consecration of the bread and wine of the Eucharist was a mode through which Christians become one with Christ. It was a way of anticipating his return on earth and thus the Eucharist was a celebration in the context of the resurrection of Christ and the potentiality of his second coming.⁸⁰

For Christians the body of Christ, in particular his blood, has significant Eucharistic meanings. In the formative years of Christianity, the Eucharist was primarily conceptualized in the Church as community. St Augustine’s writings indicate that he believed that the Church was the true body of Christ. According to his teachings, the significance of the Eucharist lies in its ability to transform the faithful into Christ. He writes, “not only have we been made Christians but we have been made Christ.”⁸¹ Hence, the Eucharist was seen as the esoteric operative at the heart of Christianity that brings about the unity of the faithful.⁸² This form of thought reached as far as St Thomas Aquinas the 13th-century theologian who later became a patron saint of Naples. Miracle tales from the late medieval period, such as the miraculous appearance of blood in the host, highlighted the use of blood as a means of demonstrating the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic bread and wine, where the wine transformed into the actual blood of Christ, thus proving the doctrine of Transubstantiation.⁸³ The blood of Christ was symbolic of his greater

⁷⁹ Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 24.

⁸⁰ Paul vu Chi Hy, “The Eschatological Dimension of the Eucharist: A systematic Exploration,” (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, 2004).

⁸¹ Raymond Moloney, “Henri de Lubac on Church and Eucharist,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 341.

⁸² Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages : Historical Survey*, Trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 103.

⁸³ Bettina Bildhauer, “Blood in Medieval Cultures,” *History Compass* 4 (2006):1049. See also, Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

suffering, through which the redemption of the soul was attained.⁸⁴ Christ's blood was seen as a medium through which humankind was guaranteed Salvation.⁸⁵ In fact, the hearts of the faithful were supposed to have been "drunk with his blood."⁸⁶ The collecting of blood relics and the development of blood cults seem to suggest that it took on a fetishistic status. It allowed the Real Presence of God to be experienced through the physical transmission and historical filiation to objects.⁸⁷ This challenged the authority of the Church as the sole mode of consecrating the blood of Christ through the Eucharist. During the Counter Reformation, the reemphasis on the Mass created a conceptual shift in the understanding of the Eucharist and the doctrine of Transubstantiation. The previous understanding of the Church as the body of Christ was replaced by the term mystical body and the Eucharist itself became the true body of Christ.⁸⁸ That being said the Eucharist as the intermediary that aided in the replication of Christ in the faithful remained a fundamental belief in the post Tridentine era.

During the post Counter Reformation era, for Italians, the body of Christ gained new importance in the construction of their Catholic identities. Where Protestants argued against the doctrine of Transubstantiation, Catholics saw the ritual of consecration as a process through which believers not only participated in the divine but also replicated God within themselves. This shift might account for a renewed focus on Christ's body. In earlier paintings such as Piero's *Flagellation*, narration of the scene took priority. However, the emphasis on the body in the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1053.

⁸⁵ Una Roman D'Elia, "Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and the Aesthetic of the Reform," *Renaissance Quarterly* 1 (2006): 102.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 4 (2002): 703.

⁸⁸ Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages : Historical Survey*, 119.

Neapolitan paintings of the theme can be understood as response, in part, to the Counter Reformation and the reiteration of the Mass. Michael Baxandall has pointed out that “the best paintings often express their culture not just directly but complementarily because it is by complementing it that they are best designed to serve the public needs: the public does not need what it has already.”⁸⁹ Pictures existed to meet needs of the institution.⁹⁰ The activity of looking at pictures was institutionalized in the sense that images were accompanied by a tradition of ecclesiastic theory. They were used to incite devotion and understanding in the minds of people. Painters were thus understood to be “professional visualizers” of biblical stories and aid the viewers’ “sensations of piety.”⁹¹ With the renewed emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist, it follows that images would have participated in this discourse as well. Hence, the Neapolitan paintings of the flagellation, commissioned primarily by religious orders, contributed to the importance placed on the Eucharist as the real body of Christ while concurrently asserting the importance of the Church in the ritual consecration of the Word. Also noteworthy is the emotive quality of the images in aiding viewers in their meditation on the pain and suffering of Christ. This begs the question as to why these Neapolitan paintings employ mechanisms other than blood to express the suffering and pain of Christ.

⁸⁹ Michael Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 48.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 40

⁹¹ Jeremy Tanner, “Michael Baxandall and the Sociological Interpretation of Art,” *Cultural Sociology* 2 (2010): 236.

3.3 Wounding the Body & Bloodless Images

Throughout history there have been conflicting responses to the problem of the wounded body. The lashed, flayed or disfigured body is often read as a symbol and unsettling physical affliction. The skin has often been conceived as a container or boundary between the interior and exterior. Thus ruptures to the skin breach the boundary between the anatomical and peripheral worlds. The symbolic value of this penetration was a language often used to activate the emotions of the faithful. Martyrs were often represented with their martyrdom wounds. These wounds become markers of their faith and willingness to suffer.

Images of torture and extreme violence were fairly common in Naples. The enthusiasm of patrons and artists for the depiction of violent imagery seems to be a distinguishing characteristic of Neapolitan art of the first half of the 17th-century.⁹² In fact, some of the artists who painted the Flagellation also contributed some of the most disturbingly violent images. One noteworthy example is Ribera's *Apollo and Marsyas* (Fig. 5), which depicts an angered Apollo flaying a restrained Marsyas. Excruciating pain is written on the face of Marsyas whose skin is tearing, rendering the interior anatomical world visible. Similarly in Caravaggio's painting, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (Fig.6), Christ identifies himself to the apostle Thomas by displaying his wound. Christ's wound is not five physical lacerations, but a single symbolic opening that represents one human and divine wound.⁹³ If violence was commonplace in Neapolitan imagery and the same artists who painted flagellation scenes also painted depictions of extreme horror,

⁹² Harald Hendrix, "The Repulsive Body: Images of Torture in Seventeenth Century Naples" in *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupation with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture*, ed.s Florike Egmond and Robert Zwijnenberg (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 69.

⁹³ Sarah Covington, *Wounds, Flesh and Metaphor in Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009),13.

one must conclude that the absence of blood in the paintings of the flagellation of Christ is an atypical phenomenon.

Given the importance of blood in Christian theology, particularly during the Counter Reformation, it might seem counterintuitive that a substance so greatly valued would resist representation. However, it is possible to make the case for the Real Presence of God in the absence of blood. During the 16th century, one of the most contested aesthetic questions surrounded the issue of *disegno* (drawing) and *colore* (color).⁹⁴ The intellectuals engaged in this debate were also entangled in Counter Reformation debates. Colonna, one such intellectual, expressed many of these Counter Reformation discourses in her poetry. Michelangelo, as a friend of Colonna's, composed several drawings in which their shared aesthetics and reform spirituality were similarly expressed.⁹⁵ Two of these drawings remain: *Christ on the Cross* (Fig. 7) and a *Pieta* (Fig. 8). In both drawings the pain and suffering of Christ and the mourning of the Virgin are expressed without tears and almost no blood.⁹⁶ Alexander Nagel has argued that the drawing of the *Pietà* that Michelangelo made for Colonna adopted a "means of reforming religious art itself."⁹⁷ The notion of the gift was inherent not only in the physical giving process of the drawing to Colonna by Michelangelo, but also in the subject matter, the sacrifice of Christ. In the depictions of the dead Christ, Michelangelo reacted against the conventions of emphasizing Christ's suffering. "Removing the blotches of blood and the wounds from Christ's body like so many overpaintings and disfigurements, Michelangelo offered instead a pristine and radiant dead

⁹⁴ Maurice Poirier, "The Disegno-Colore Controversy Reconsidered." *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 13 (1987): 54.

⁹⁵ D'Elia, "Christ's Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna and the Aesthetic of Reform," 91.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁷ Alexander Nagel, Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, *The Art Bulletin* 4 (1997): 647.

Christ based on the models of Ancient sculpture.”⁹⁸ The use of specific aesthetic strategies, allowed Michelangelo to represent Christ’s sacrifice in terms of figure, transcendence and history.⁹⁹

Counter Reformation thought in general, according to Nagel, “exhibits a deep ambivalence towards the contemplation of Christ and Mary’s suffering during the Passion.”¹⁰⁰ Building on Nagel’s ideas, Una Roman D’Elia suggests that in some works, the suffering by Christ and Mary is insisted upon to an extreme degree and yet simultaneously negated, often animating the work through this juxtaposed tension. Quoting Bernardino Ochino, a famous Capuchin preacher, she sets up a complex relationship between intellectual sophistication and a simple faith in Christ Crucified. Ochino demanded that believers “perform exegetical violence on Scripture in order to reach a higher meaning than the merely dramatic. It is only by lacerating the flesh of a literal sensual understanding that the devout can move beyond the carnal.”¹⁰¹ This allowed for a symbolic component to Scripture where believers could decipher moral and ethical lessons. Thus for Ochino, images of the Passion have to be more than visual representations of suffering but also had to consist of an intellectualized vision of virtue. His writings emphasize the greatness of Christ’s sacrifice but condemn the focus on the physical suffering. In a passage that he wrote on Christ’s lament on the Cross, he references Christ’s eternal suffering through the Eucharist changing it from Christ’s weakest moment to a heroic act of self sacrifice.¹⁰² Roman D’Elia concluded by suggesting that in Michelangelo’s drawings, pain is not dramatized in a

⁹⁸ Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

⁹⁹ D’Elia, “Christ’s Blood: Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna and the Aesthetic of Reform,” 94.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 109.

horrific visual representation but rather is mediated upon as a disembodied notion, a sentiment derived out of the Counter Reformation debates. Thus, one could argue, that given all the violence in other contexts, Christ is made to stand out as heroic and divine precisely by deemphasizing the violence to him despite viewers knowing the Passion story.

The unscathed body of Christ as represented by Michelangelo, illustrates the shifting ideology of the Eucharist during the Counter Reformation. Michelangelo set a new precedent for the representation of physical suffering viewing it as a sacrifice and gift to humanity. The later paintings of the Flagellation follow this precedent of depicting the body as unblemished and immortalize Christ as an agent of salvation. These Neapolitan paintings facilitated the meditation on Christ's suffering without the distraction of a horrifying perforated body. Since the emphasis on the body of Christ in the Eucharist, while a commemoration of his willingness to suffer for the sins of mankind, is also a celebration of his resurrection, a bloodied depiction of Christ would undermine the entire theological argument for transubstantiation and put the authority of the Church at stake. And yet these are not scenes that prompt apathy; on the contrary they are highly dramatized and emotive, soliciting the viewer's engagement. In the earlier sections of this chapter, I noted the formal aesthetic aspects of the paintings that functioned as mechanisms for heightening drama and conveying the pain and suffering of Christ. In the concluding section of this chapter, I address the more theoretical underpinnings of these images, primarily the issue of how pain is expressed in the external world when it is an individual experience. To derive a philosophical understanding of how pain is portrayed and why expressions of it are important, I turn to the writings of Elaine Scarry, Hannah Arendt and Ludwig Wittgenstein. While theoretical in nature, this section is a critical link to understanding the performative aspects of the

flagellation practice and imagery in 17th-century Naples, a topic I take up in the final Chapter of this thesis.

3.4 Representing Pain in Images

The principle of *imitatio Christi* infers the belief that pain is transferable and shared, allowing the faithful to fuse mentally and even physically with Christ's body.¹⁰³ Yet pain is by its nature a private intrinsic experience that defies representation. An image can never truly represent the complexity of a lived experience. Pain is an invisible sensation that an individual experiences but cannot share with others. However, while an individual experience, pain is simultaneously a universal aspect of the human experience. The complexity of this relationship between intrinsic and universality lies in the fact that while pain is felt by an individual, its expression can be empathized by others. Thus a description of a private experience can be communicated in public. Yet to describe something is not the same as to experience it.

The Cartesian subject-self model provides the basis on which most accounts of pain are predicated. By this I mean that most arguments are based on the subject self as being a defined interior entity that only relates to the world through language. For Arendt, pain along with the other passions are entities that have an uncertain reality. In her argument, Arendt states that there are two processes that are required in the transformation from private to public. First agents need to articulate to others their experience. Through this process of communication to others, the agent brings to reality the experience they are having. Second, it is necessary to have other

¹⁰³ Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 162.

agents around to either hear or see the experience an individual is having.¹⁰⁴ That being said, Arendt is resistant to the notion that pain can be communicated at all. Because of its fundamental nature, she asserts that, “pain is the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance.”¹⁰⁵ Bodily pain, she continues, “is the most radical subjectivity”¹⁰⁶ that has no place in the external world. In fact, because it is experienced within the confines of the body it is in direct opposition to the external world.

Similarly, Scarry asserts that pain is a fundamentally private experience. Scarry’s logic follows that the individual experiencing pain relies on language in order to describe the sensation of that pain to others. Ironically, for Scarry, pain not only resists language but destroys it. That is not to say that the expression of pain cannot enter into the external world. Unlike Arendt, Scarry believes that pain can enter into the external world. She states that despite being “so bereft of the resources of speech, it is not surprising that the language for pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak on behalf of those who are.” The main difference between these two arguments is their differing political agendas.¹⁰⁷ Scarry’s goal is to diminish pain, and communicate the horror of physical pain to those who are not themselves in pain. Thus, in order to accomplish this goal, she has to allow for the body in pain to enter into the external world; however, she maintains that pain-in-itself is still a necessarily private, thought destroying event.¹⁰⁸ This expression of pain is not to be confused with the

¹⁰⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 50.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Young Cheon Cho, “The Politics of Suffering in the Public Sphere: The Body in Pain, Empathy, And Political Spectacles” (PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

sensation of pain itself, but only a description of that which is happening in the internal body of the subject.¹⁰⁹ Because pain is marked with uncertainty its experience is relegated to the internal world however the description or expression of the pain can enter the external world.

Wittgenstein similarly argues that “the expression of pain is not an imperfect attempt to convey the interiority of one’s sentiment state, but rather of the experience of pain itself.”¹¹⁰

While Wittgenstein believes that pain is an internal experience and, like Scarry, he allows for the possibility of pain to enter the external world, he challenges her argument stating that behaviors associated with pain are part of the process of pain.¹¹¹ In other words, built into the structure of pain is the expression of pain. Thus Wittgenstein’s argument for pain goes one step further than Scarry’s in that he is suggesting that the expression of pain is a part of the common experience. In line with his language arguments, Wittgenstein argues that pain, while an internal experience, resides in the external world through language or pain behaviors. Hypothetically if this were true, then expressions of pain such as screams, would not merely be descriptions but would be pain itself. However, there seems to be a fallacy in the argument as there are cases where pain is experienced but not expressed or alternatively where pain is being falsely expressed. Take for example Passion plays in the early modern era, where individuals reenacted Christ’s trial, suffering and death. During these reenactments, actors, in accordance with their role, pretended to whip themselves and howled in pain to express the suffering Christ experienced during his flagellation.¹¹² Based on Wittgenstein’s logic, the actor whipping himself was not performing but

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Dauphinee, “Reading the Ethics of Imagery”, *Security Dialogue* 2 (2007): 141.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 150.

¹¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology: The Inner and the Outer*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 29-33.

¹¹² On Medieval Passion Plays see, Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

actually experiencing pain. Of course, Wittgenstein might argue that since pain and language cannot be divorced from each other, lying about pain is a pain behavior in itself, where the lie is an expression of the lack of pain. Yet, a lie is not a negation of pain; it is the false expression of a possible valid experience, simply not one that is occurring at that particular time. Of course, Wittgenstein does not state that behaviors associated with pain are necessitated in every instance of the experience. However, his interest in pain is not directly associated with performance. Thus, Scarry's account of pain is contextually more relevant than Wittgenstein's in regards to this thesis.

Pain is an internal experience that can be indicated in the external world in certain ways. Following Scarry's theory on pain, her structure for torture provides a framework that leads to the development of an aesthetic imagery of pain where the iconography or symbols become a stand in for the pain itself.¹¹³ Scarry argues that there are three simultaneous phenomena in the structure of torture: first, the infliction of pain; second, the objectification of the subjective attribute of pain; and lastly, the translation of the objectified attributes of pain into the insignia of power.¹¹⁴ It is the last of these phenomena that concerns itself with representations of violence. Of this final step, Scarry states:

“As an actual physical fact, a weapon is an object that goes into the body and produces pain. As a perceptual fact, it lifts the pain out of the body and makes it visible or, more precisely, it acts as a bridge or mechanism across which some of pain's attributes - its incontestable reality, its totality, its ability to eclipse all else, its power of dramatic alteration and world dissolution- can be lifted away from their source, can be separated from the sufferer and referred to power, broken off from the body and attached instead to the regime.”

¹¹³ Dauphinee, “Reading the Ethics of Imagery,” 142.

¹¹⁴ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 51.

Scarry's argument here is that accouterments of torture such as weapons come to represent more than themselves as objects since they gain power, which acts as a mediator between the internal and external worlds. These accouterments of torture not only convey pain but also the potential to inflict pain. Thus weapons become a stand in for actual violence. More importantly, it is the threat of violence through imagery that regimes of power use to accomplish their agendas. This potential for violence is particularly important for considering 17th-century paintings of the Flagellation where violence is hinted at through accouterments of torture rather than blood.

The argument for pain is two fold. Firstly, pain is an internal experience that can be alluded to externally. Secondly, accouterments of torture can become emblematic of pain and thus stand in for the experience in the external world. Returning to the practice of flagellation and depictions of the flagellation of Christ, Scarry's theory allows us to gain an understanding of how both may have functioned in Naples. In terms of the practice, flagellation as performed by Neapolitans was a public ritual that expressed an internal experience in an external form. While physical pain itself was not something that could be transmitted to others, the expression of the experience could be demonstrated to others performing or viewing the event. The performance aspect of ritual flagellation is a topic I will explore in further detail in the next chapter. The paintings of the Flagellation, on the other hand, though absent of blood, include iconographic details such as the assailants and the scourge. These instruments of torture are imbued with potentiality in part through the history of visual images that preceded the paintings considered here. Due to the familiarity of the scene to the vast majority of viewers, these iconographic details become emblematic of violence and extensions of the body. They move beyond being

mere objects and gain a power of representation that alludes to not only the biblical story but also the larger structure of the Catholic Church and its doctrine of the *Imitatio Christi*.

Chapter 4 Performance

4.1 Religious Orders in Naples

Early modern Naples was a much contested region with various countries and religious orders jostling for control. In 1503 Spanish troops entered Naples, defeating the French and establishing Spanish control under King Ferdinand II of Aragon. This was the beginning of a two hundred year reign that ushered in the era of Spanish viceroys.¹¹⁵ During this era, a cultural exchange between the Spanish and the religious orders resulted in the monumental production of churches, monasteries, painting and sculptural commissions.

Southern Italy, particularly Naples, has always been noted for the religious fervor and fanatical practices of its laity. Toward the end of the 16th-century, Naples was characterized as an unruly, violent and immoral city. Early chroniclers of the city often paint a picture of constant instability. This view of the city was fostered by its increasing urban population, as well as the decadence of the nobility and rampant criminality.¹¹⁶ Anxiety over possible shortage of grain leading to an increased price of bread, and the unpopular Spanish taxations, further aggravated tensions within the city. On another front, the citizens of Naples, well known for their piety, became increasingly discontent with their spiritual leaders. Prior to the Council of Trent, Church reformers in Naples had already rallied against clerical abuses, such as pastoral neglect, ignorance, absenteeism and cohabitation with concubines.¹¹⁷ These economic and social problems manifested in several civil revolts, including those of 1585 and 1647-48. During this

¹¹⁵ Jordan Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius: A Cultural History of Naples* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 87.

¹¹⁶ Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuit Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples*, 44.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

period Naples was largely in need of spiritual and cultural reform, thus becoming a prime locale for new religious orders who preached against the existing Church structures.

The Catholic Reformation of the 16th century saw the founding of new religious orders that not only reinvigorated the Church but also fostered the re-establishment of the late medieval Observance movements.¹¹⁸ Some of the most notable orders include the Theatines, Spanish Carmelites, Jesuits and the Barnabites. The Spanish government, a great advocate of the Counter Reformation, welcomed and gave protection to the new orders that flocked to Naples. With the encouragement of the Catholic Church, these religious orders flourished and even resulted in the overcrowding of the city of Naples. By 1580, there were approximately 92 monasteries and convents with 3800 inhabitants.¹¹⁹ In 1596, during the diocesan reform, the city was reorganized into 33 minor parishes under the control of four major ones. Religious patronage and practices flourished in the late 16th- and 17th-centuries resulting in a construction boom that saw over 150 churches and monastic projects begun between 1600 and 1650 alone.¹²⁰

Naples' diverse demographic, socio-political factors and location made it a fertile ground for the various religious orders, including the Carmelites, Jesuits, Theatines and Oratorians. Older orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans also found it accommodating to their reform and renewal ideas. As a means of promoting and exerting their presence within the city, they constructed churches and complexes. Further intensifying the building boom was the Counter Reformation's emphasis on ritual and its affirmation of the importance of the soul. This

¹¹⁸ Mullett, *Catholic Reformation*, 82.

¹¹⁹ Maria Ann Conelli, "The Gesu Nuovo in Naples: Politics, property and religion" (Ph.D Diss., Columbia University, 1992).

¹²⁰ John A Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 25.

emphasis on elaborate rituals required more churches and ones that were elaborately decorated. According to earlier Counter Reformation leaders such as Carlo Borromeo, spending large sums of money on opulent sacred buildings was an appropriate means of displaying the sanctity of the Church. In his book *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* (1577), he outlined a program of magnificence for churches to be “constructed with a dignity commensurate with the Eucharist and holy relics contained within.”¹²¹

Rivalry between the Theatines and Jesuits over the magnificence of their churches was chronicled and mocked by many.¹²² Their ambitions pushed Borromeo’s ideas of a dignified Church interior to the limits of reasonable interpretation while also infusing the entire ecclesiastic population of Naples with the Cardinal’s logic of demarcating sacred space.¹²³ Besides the Oratorians, most other orders could not compete with their richly decorated churches but that did not deter them from building, much to the financial detriment of the city.¹²⁴ As a result of this building boom, artists and craftsmen flocked to Naples in search of commissions. Important foreign artists such as Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, Jusepe de Ribera, and local artists such as Andrea Vaccaro, Batistello Caracciolo, Bernado Cavallino and Luca Giordano all developed important artistic works for the various orders, including versions of the Flagellation of Christ.¹²⁵

¹²¹ John Nicholas Napoli, “From Social Virtue to Revetted Interior: Giovanni Antonio Dosio and Marble Inlay in Rome, Florence, and Naples,” *Art History* 4 (2008): 534.

¹²² Romeo De Maio, “The Counter- Reformation and Painting in Naples” in *Painting in Naples 1606-1705*, ed.s Clovis Whitfield and Jane Martineau (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1982), 32.

¹²³ John Nicholas Napoli, “From Social Virtue to Revetted Interior: Giovanni Antonio Dosio and Marble Inlay in Rome, Florence, and Naples,” 535.

¹²⁴ Romeo De Maio, “The Counter- Reformation and Painting in Naples”, 32.

¹²⁵ Cordelia Warr and Janis Elliott, “Introduction: Reassessing Naples 1266-1713,” *Art History* 4 (2008): 431.

4.2 Flagellation as a Public Spectacle

Neapolitans, though renowned for their piety, were also known for their tendency towards cult worship. The laity tended to respond towards cult figures primarily because it allowed them to deal with the difficulties of daily life that included the deaths of children, bad harvests, illness, plagues and natural disasters, such as the ever looming possibility of Mount Vesuvius erupting.¹²⁶ Many of these rituals took on violent characteristics where people mutilated themselves.¹²⁷ Religious control in Naples by Episcopal authorities as well as the religious orders was particularly difficult because of the existing religious practices and temperament of the population.¹²⁸ Solidarity and resistance to the Church and Spanish authorities by the population led to the defeat of most attempts to regulate local religious traditions. Thus, several of these new orders as well as older established religious orders found a way to take advantage of these established popular practices in an attempt to garner a local following. One such existing practice was flagellation.

The practice of flagellation arose spontaneously amongst the laity in the late Middle Ages in Naples and persisted into the early modern period as a result of local traditions that were adapted and institutionalized by orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits.¹²⁹ Also significant was Spanish control of Naples that led to the reintroduction of the Good Friday Procession where a procession of flagellants marched the streets in silence dressed in penitential

¹²⁶ Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuit Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples*, 50.

¹²⁷ Michael P. Carroll, *Madonnas that Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy Since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 131.

¹²⁸ Peter A. Masur, "The Baptism of Muslim Slaves in Spanish Naples 1593-1667," *Journal of Early Modern History* 13 (2009):39.

¹²⁹ Francesco Provenzale and Dinko Fabris, *Music in Seventeenth Century Naples* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007), 4.

robes and lashed themselves with scourges.¹³⁰ Holy Week ceremonies were generally carried out in accordance with Spanish customs.

Noteworthy here is the influence of Giuseppe di Copertino, or Joseph of Cupertino, a Franciscan friar, born in the Kingdom of Naples in 1603. He caused such an impression on the Neapolitans that they publicly declared him the “Apostle of the Kingdom,” flocking to him and creating a fanatical following.¹³¹ He was said to possess extraordinary powers including the ability to smell out witches and heal illnesses. Curing and healing through touch and the sign of the Cross were further miraculous feats he was believed to perform. It was noted that he beat himself twice a week to the point that his cell walls, thirty years later, still bore the blood from his wounds.¹³² Cupertino was intoxicated with the Passion and the *imitatio Christi*, evidently flagellating himself to a point of frenzy.

Not satisfied even with this, he would ask others to flog him so that he was sensible only of pain. If ever he was assailed by impure thoughts or vain fancies, or some distraction, he would flog himself to the very bone. His favorite instruments of self-torture were ropes tipped with crooked needles, followed by steel rowels with sharp points which tore flesh so that the blood streamed down and he would fall into the deepest of swoons.¹³³

It was this attunement to Christ’s Passion that allowed him seemingly to communicate directly with God, to heal and to perform various miracles. The theatrical appeal of di Copertino’s acts of healing and his penitential practice drew large groups of people, causing alarm in the Holy Office of Naples.

¹³⁰ Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples*, 95.

¹³¹ Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 55.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 56

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 56

Yet another example of this fervor was the practice of self-mortification by the Jesuits, perhaps the most widely studied order in Naples. Beyond the ritual character of bodily mortification, the Jesuits recognized its theatrical aspects and its efficacy in aiding conversion of the population. Given the popularity of theater in early modern Europe, the strategy adapted by the Jesuits is unsurprising. They developed their own version of the Spanish “Theatre of Suffering” and referred to it sometimes as a “sanctified carnival.”¹³⁴ By the mid 17th century, the Jesuits had incorporated highly ritualized penitential activities into their missions. As Scipione Paolucci noted in his history of three Jesuit missions to the Kingdom of Naples, the “schools of mortification” as he labeled them, were incorporated into penitential processions or outdoor sermons.¹³⁵

Having convinced the mind and inspired affection with fervor, in order to give some test to the sentiments of the heart, everyone was invited to make some act of penitence in satisfaction of their errors. Sometimes the father begins and is either struck on the cheek by some cleric, who has already been designated and instructed to this end, or ill treated [like an] animal with injurious acts and words, and in various ways, reproached himself for his malice and audacity in offending the common Gentleman.¹³⁶

This practice was essentially used to move the audience to an emotional state similar to what they would experience at profane theatrical performances. The Jesuits went to extremes to create dramatic effects, even using props such as a death skull and also whips to instruct people in the appropriate manner of self-flagellation.

Through processions, theatrical staging or sermons, the various religious orders and confraternities, both Spanish and Neapolitans participated in the development of a cultural

¹³⁴ Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuit Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples*, 216.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 228

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 228

movement where the practice of flagellation moved beyond simply being a private intimate experience to a performance in the a shared world. I consider these performances primarily because they are not simply an individual's experience but are staged in a public arena, creating a spectacle where people are moved to frenzy. A mass hysteria often followed a flagellation performance where people agitated each other and participated in the *imitatio Christi*. Thus, before returning to paintings of the flagellation of Christ, it is important to understand the performativity of flagellation in public. This understanding of the ritualized performance of flagellation, as I will explain, migrated from the physical into the imagery and thus allowed viewers of the flagellation paintings to experience the *imitatio Christi* without having to witness actual physical pain.

4.3 The Performance of the Moving Image

Performances of flagellation took on several forms in 17th-century Naples. From the literal stage performances of the Jesuit theatre where props were used to elucidate to the laymen the symbolism of flagellation, to more obscurely defined performances such as processions or even watching someone self-flagellate, as in the case of the Franciscan friar di Copertino. While these performances differ in their modality, they equivocally utilize the body as a site of religious experience and identity formation. In the previous Chapter, I discussed pain in terms of its internal and external aspects concluding that only a description of pain can enter the external world. I also discussed the performativity of pain in that there are often behaviors such as speech associated with it. Building on this, I would like to develop the idea of gestures as language and show that it is the repetition of these gestures within the structure of a ritual that generates a

participant's identity, identity being a crucial element in understanding the emotive qualities of flagellation.

The expression of pain occurs in many forms, most often in terms of speech. A person in pain often expresses himself or herself vocally. These vocalizations of pain can take several forms, from unintelligible screams to cognizable sentences. Regardless, such utterances of pain are predominantly recognizable. Hence, built into the structure of an utterance are the sociological and cultural underpinnings that render them meaningful. By this I mean that an utterance can only exist if it is accepted as a paradigm of cultural and societal beliefs. That being said, utterances that comply with the conventional laws governing them can also be seen to constitute those conventions.¹³⁷ For example a person who is whipped might scream out loud. This scream may or may not be intelligible. However someone hearing this would immediately recognize it as derived from a person experiencing pain. The mechanism at work here is repetition where an act governed by a set of laws continuously manifests itself under the right circumstances. In other words, due to the common laws governing a person in pain, the most likely outcome would be a vocal expression of this pain, in this case a scream. However, it is the repetition of this scenario through history that reinforces the laws governing the outcome. Essentially, because it is usually the case that people scream when in pain, a person hearing a scream would immediately recognize it as such. Thus, utterances are both governed by laws while also constituting those laws that govern them.

Utterances can take on two main forms, constative or performative. A “constative” is an utterance that makes claims about the world that can be considered true or false and

¹³⁷ Kira Hall, “Performativity,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9 (2000): 185.

“performative” utterances are those that can fail or succeed but are neither true or false.¹³⁸ An example of a performative utterance would be “I whip,” where words are used to communicate an action that might occur but is neither true or false.¹³⁹ In addition, these performative utterances are subjugated to a set of laws. Gestures can be considered as performative utterances if performed under conditions—rituals, such as marriage—that make them meaningful, and if those gestures change the state of the participants. Herein lies the pertinence of performatives for thinking about early flagellation since rituals involve bodily gestures such as posture, patterns of movement, and repetition.¹⁴⁰

The performance of a ritual requires two conditions. First a participant must know how to perform the ritual and all the bodily gestures associated with the act. However, simultaneously, the participant must also know the social norms that are associated with this ritual. A participant must be able to read the activities of others around and be able to appropriately respond to the situation.¹⁴¹ This requires not only a bodily function but to some extent a reflective understanding. The participant not only has to be able to “do” the ritual but to some extent understand the sociological implications of the act. Thus, it is not simply the collectivity of the group that shapes the emotions of the individual but rather it is through their performance in the collective ritual that shapes their intentional, emotional and imaginative lives.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Marla Carlson, “Performative Pain: Building Culture on the Bodies of Actors and Artists” (Ph.D diss., The City University of New York, 2002).

¹³⁹ J.L. Austin, *The Works of J.L. Austin: How To Do Things With Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) Electronic version, 19.

¹⁴⁰ Nick Crossley, “Ritual, Body Technique and (Inter)subjectivity” in *Thinking Through Ritual: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴² Ibid., 42.

Thinking about flagellation as ritualized performance allows us to derive an understanding of how participants in a ritual not only construct their embodied and spiritual understanding, but also how they might shape their emotional responses with others. Within this structure, identity is constructed in terms of an individual's relationship to him or herself, to others and one's environment. It is for this reason that a subject's agency is particularly important in the formation of identity. Since agency implies an element of volition, the construction of the self is not solely based on repetition and normative values, but also on the conscious decision in the participation of one's own identity. Returning to the 17th-century Neapolitan context, flagellants in a procession, for example, would have not only known their role but also their part in relation to other participants and to the procession itself. Importantly, because of Counter Reformation efforts made by the various religious orders, the flagellant understood the larger theological importance of the flagellation in the context of Christ's willingness to suffer for humankind. Thus participants constructed their identities in relation to each other, their role in the ritual, and to Christ.

Rituals can be used to repress or produce contents in our consciousness leading to different emotional responses. Of course, as rituals can be performed habitually, participants may not always recognize the states they might produce in their awareness. This is primarily because rituals evoke an imaginative state through subjective transformations. The active participation in an embodied ritual controls and frames emotions and the imagination. Rituals have a set of prescribed rules that participants abide by while simultaneously reinforcing them. Moreover, rituals have a sociological/cultural context that gives them meaning. By adapting and promoting flagellation as a means of engaging in *imitatio Christi*, religious orders through their authority

legitimized and ritualized the act. Through enacting it within their authority, these religious orders were able to sanction a set of rules that would guide participants in how to properly participate in ritual flagellation, preventing it from mutating into a heretical form.

Contextualizing flagellation in terms of *imitatio Christi* also allowed orders consciously to cultivate mental states, such as an empathetic understanding of the pain and suffering of Christ while dictating the normative relations between physicality, reflection, and identity.¹⁴³

Ritual by its definition is performative. It is a sequence of acts: gestures that are performed repeatedly by participating individuals that may change one's inner state. Not only do these individuals have to know the correct gestures but they also have to know the various roles that different individuals might have within the structure of that specific ritual. It is an act that is carried out with the purpose of embodying the doctrine of *imitatio Christi* that for 17th-century Neapolitans was a way to expiate their sins and to demonstrate their love for Christ. Whether it is performed literally, as in the case of the Jesuit theaters of suffering, or as part of a procession where only select individuals self-flagellate while others are onlookers, flagellation, as a ritual, has specific performative functions. Within its structure, it has different roles for various individuals as well as specific techniques. Moreover, it is done in a public forum with the intention of producing a mental state. It also creates a dynamic where individuals either participating or watching become part of a collective through which they construct their identities, in this case as 17th-century Catholics emoting the pain and suffering of Christ.

Those not flagellating themselves in the ritual have as strongly constructed an identity through the act of “viewing” as those actually “doing.” Because ritual requires that individuals

¹⁴³ Paula M. Cooney, *Religious Imagination and the Body: A feminist Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 120.

know their roles as well as the roles of others and act in accordance, it produces imagining subjects. These imagining subjects participate in a ritual producing within themselves a mental state. This mental state in relation to flagellation would be a meditation or reflection on the suffering of Christ. Within the context of the flagellation ritual, the act of “viewing” can be framed as a role or gesture, just as the act of self-flagellation would be. In this case “viewing” can be equated as “doing.” Thus an argument can be made that the viewing of the flagellation also produced a similar emotive mental state that the physical act of flagellation generates. By extension, viewing a painting of the Flagellation of Christ evokes this participatory experience of viewing someone self-flagellating. This argument will be further developed in the following section.

4.4 Paintings of the Flagellation of Christ

What is particularly intriguing and unique about the 17th-century Neapolitan paintings of the Flagellation is that they do not show the actual blows of the scourge. Blood is absent in the paintings that instead present viewers with different moments that anticipate violence. As mentioned in Chapter Three the body of Christ is unscathed and luminescent. Torture is implied through accouterments such as the scourge. This begs the question as to why in a culture where flagellation was so prevalent were images of the Flagellation indirect in their mode of representation?

The art of the 17th century normally adhered to strict Tridentine decrees. However, unlike elsewhere in Italy, Naples had been influenced by the monastic orders linked to Theresian and Alcantarian reform. This movement emphasized a form of mystical devotion that employed a

high emotional content and saw the renewal of a more direct link between the followers and the divine.¹⁴⁴ This context may help to account for the specific ways in which visual imagery was used to illustrate the more abstract elements of religious doctrine and to serve as emotive aids by inspiring empathy.¹⁴⁵ Taking into consideration Neapolitan expressions of religiosity, it is not surprising that subjects that reflected and exalted the pain and suffering of human existence were prominent.¹⁴⁶ However, what sets the flagellation of Christ apart from other violent themes is its status as both the quintessential symbol of suffering—an archetype—and also a demonstration of violence that is enacted repeatedly. The Flagellation is thus a prototype for pain and suffering within Christian theology. The paintings of the body of Christ, not yet flayed but repeatedly anticipating it, set the process of empathy and emulation in motion.

The doctrine of *imitatio Christi* stresses the importance of acting like Christ, but to profess to become exactly like him was considered heretical. This sets up a fundamental difference between Christ and his followers where an act can never be precisely replicated. Given the striking prevalence of flagellation in Naples, resistance in the paintings to the effects of mortification on Christ's body sets his divinity apart from his followers—the inability of human flagellants to replicate fully the sacred event. Thus the negation of the act in the images may have been a way of acknowledging Christ's suffering as the apex of sacrifices and one that can never be duplicated.

In 17th-century Naples, paintings of the Flagellation of Christ became ubiquitous for various reasons. The practice of flagellation was a tradition that predated the Counter

¹⁴⁴ Nicola Spinosa, "Baroque and Classical Tendencies in Neapolitan Painting 1650-1700" in *Painting in Naples 1606-1705*, ed.s Clovis Whitfield and Jane Martineau (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1982), 50.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 50.

Reformation and sprouted spontaneously out of the laity. However, in the post Counter Reformation era, religious orders, in an attempt to reform the Church and ecclesiastic practice, incorporated flagellation as a way of participating in the doctrine of *imitatio Christi*. The emphasis on the mystical devotion and the need for theatrics migrated from its dynamic forms such as procession, staging and schools of mortification, to static forms such as painting. The importance of art for the Church was its ability to create a sensory reaction in viewers. Thus, images of the Flagellation of Christ had the difficult task of moving people while simultaneously distinguishing Christ's willing act from the mundane practice of the flagellation. Capitalizing on the faithful being well versed in the theological underpinnings of the Passion, resulting from Counter Reformation efforts, the paintings by Caravaggio, Ribera and others do not need to depict the flaying of Christ's body, which is instead called up by viewers through their repeated experiences of the ritual enactment of flagellation in the city. These paintings evoked a multi-sensory experience that engaged believers emotionally and intellectually. Looking at representations of the Flagellation allowed a viewer to recall the moment in the Passion and to meditate on the internalization of suffering depicted in the painting. This would have made the experience a participatory one intensified by the oscillation between aesthetics and ritual. Viewers of these paintings understood their roles and what was expected of them. This allowed them to solidify their identities as Catholics through the act of viewing, emoting and identifying. Thus, one can conclude that 17th-century Neapolitans were participating in the *imitatio Christi* purely through the act of viewing a painting of the flagellation of Christ.

Conclusion

Repetition

One of the main points of contention with the literature on Caravaggio is that scholars tend to frame artists he influenced as followers. This is a notion I have questioned in this thesis. Certainly Caravaggio's *Flagellation of Christ* was the first of a series of flagellation images produced in 17th-century Naples. However, there were several factors—not only copying an eminent artist—that account for the volume of images produced after Caravaggio's painting.

In the first chapter, I laid out the historical context that transformed flagellation from a form of corporal punishment used by monks to a movement by the laity that was not always met with enthusiasm by the Church. I demonstrated the importance of the Counter Reformation in reinvigorating the practice. Through visual analysis of three paintings, I proposed that each presents a moment prior to the event, and together they attest to a concern with the body of Christ. Chapter three explored the emphasis on the body of Christ and its connection to the Eucharist during the Counter Reformation. The importance of Eucharist as the primary mode of communing with the Divine reinforced the sanctity of the blood of Christ. Drawing on scholarly arguments regarding a drawing by Michelangelo, I suggested that Christ's divinity is conveyed precisely through the lack of violence. His unscathed body allows viewers to see him as heroic and ethereal while meditating on his willingness to suffer. The final section of Chapter Three explained that violence and pain is conveyed in these images through other means such as accouterments of torture that become an extension of Christ's body. They stand in for the actual body and gain the power to persuade viewers of the impending violence. The final chapter of this thesis contextualized these paintings in a Neapolitan setting. Building on the religious scene of

Naples, from the competing orders to the influx of artists along with the widespread practice of flagellation, I showed that these Neapolitan paintings were responding to a unique socio-cultural moment. To conclude, I framed the process of viewing a painting of the flagellation as a ritual, thus engaging believers in a multi-sensory experience that triggered both their understanding of theology and empathy towards the pain and suffering of Christ.

To consider further how these paintings of the flagellation might have operated within the larger social discourse of the 17th-century, I turn to Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, to provide a theoretical framework. As Deleuze writes:

Returning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power; the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turns around the different. Such an identity, produced by difference, is determined by 'repetition'. Repetition in the eternal return, therefore, consists in conceiving the same on the basis of the different.¹⁴⁷

Central to his argument is the idea of identity. Through the theories of other philosophers such as Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche, Deleuze formulates an ontological understanding of *Being*. For Deleuze, identity is a secondary principle that is produced as an effect. Difference-in-itself, as he calls it, is based not on resemblances but on difference. Here the prior historical subordination of difference is inverted and identity is seen as unfounded. There is no *a priori* identity; rather difference occurs as a result of repetition in time. As Deleuze writes, "There is the *Other* in the repetition of the *Same*."¹⁴⁸ Difference is essentially the dissimilarity between entities. This might be perceived as creating the model/copy dynamic, but on the contrary, in actuality it sets up a procession of creating such that an entity can never be reproduced. This concept of difference rejects the notion of a copy and focuses on the actualization of difference(s). Viewed in this

¹⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 41.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

manner, each painting of the flagellation scene is not simply a repetition of an original, but rather unfolds into a multiplicity of different forms.

Time for Deleuze is central to his theory of difference and repetition, for only within this setting can a repetition occur. He rejects both Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche's notions of time stating that they do not allow for difference, but instead the repetition of the same which Deleuze argues is not possible. As such, for Deleuze everything that exists as a unity cannot return; what recurs in the "Eternal Return" is something different.¹⁴⁹ This difference should not be articulated as a negation of sameness, but rather as the inability to reproduce something identically, allowing for the production of something new. Moreover, this distinction between the entity and the production of something new allows "for the ability to creatively respond to a situation rather than simply habitually reacting."¹⁵⁰ Through this reconceptualization of time, Deleuze works against the conventional platonic notion of transcendental ideas, where a concept is continually repeated in the forms of copies or representations. Moreover, the concept of time is built into the structural understanding of the original in that all copies are simply brought back to life in a diminished capacity. This resonates with the referential framework used in the classification of works by the Caravaggisti as regressed imitations of Caravaggio's "original." However, each of the paintings of the flagellation actualizes difference as an intensity in itself. Since organisms for Deleuze function as sites of transformations where differences are actualized, each painting is re-conceived as a site of an event.¹⁵¹ Thus, each painting functions as

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁵⁰ Simon O' Sullivan, "The Strange Temporality of the Subject: Badiou and Deleuze Between the Finite and Infinite," *Subjectivity* 27 (2009):166.

¹⁵¹ Gregory Minissale, "Deleuze and Duchamp: *La Boite-en-valise*," *Drain: A Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture*, *Rewind* 1 (2010).

an event which may or may not involve an organism that does not constitute the entire event since it also relates to time and other events.¹⁵² This sets up a series constituted by significant works that relate to each other intertextually, but that avoid relating back to a model. The principle of becoming necessitates that each event may be a combination of various factors within the same duration. Thus, these paintings can be combined into a series making it a multiplicity of serialities without reduction to a master copy.¹⁵³

The rejection of the platonic concept of ideas and the traditional Kantian concept of time allow for a new phenomenological exposition of time that is centered on a viewer who experiences and constitutes reality. It allows for a series of images to relate to each other without being a copy of an original in which all historicity and transcendental ideas are located. In avoiding this linear conventional way of thinking, we can view paintings by Caracciolo, Ribera, Cavallino, Vaccaro and Giordano as more than copies of Caravaggio's *The Flagellation of Christ*. Instead, we can conceive of them as separate events that relate to each other but maintain an independent identity of their own. Naples in the 17th-century was a unique moment where the repetition of gestures, the use of art and ritual by religious order to control the sacred and the oscillation between self-reflection and communal identity culminated.¹⁵⁴ Taking into consideration this socio-cultural context and given the nature of the works themselves, these paintings can be seen as a series that represents a historical event in different ways. Their difference-in-itself brings something new to each painting and allows it to be a separate event

¹⁵² Ibid.,

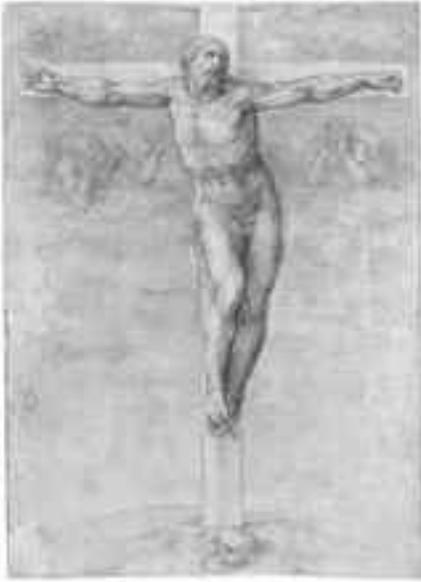
¹⁵³ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁴ See, Edward Muir, "The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities," in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Steven Ozment, (Kirkville: Mo., 1989).

that brings a historical past into the present. As a series, they relate to each other and can be recombined in various ways in an infinite multiplicity. However, regardless of their arrangement, these works of art are moments within a structure, generated during a period, 17th-century Naples, when there was an ongoing social discourse around flagellation and the practice of the *imitatio Christi*.

Figures

Figure 7



Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Christ on the Cross*, London, The British Museum
Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum

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