

Correggio's *Second Coming* in San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma: Transfiguration and Resurrection, and Divinity and Humanity*

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Introduction

A High Renaissance Italian painter, Antonio Allegri da Correggio (c. 1489-1534), frescoed the dome in the monastery of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma in Italy from 1520 to 1521 (Fig. 1, 2). The monastery belonged to a Benedictine monastic reform group, the Cassinese Congregation¹, and it was this Congregation that commissioned Correggio to paint the dome².

An isolated figure of Christ wearing a white shining garment hovers in the center of the crossing dome. The Apostles on the clouds surround him, among whom only St. Peter with the keys is identifiable. At the base of the western side of the dome, just above the cornice near the nave, aged St. John, the patron of the church, is placed below all the other Apostles (Fig. 3). This figure of St. John is tucked under the front rim of the dome, and completely invisible from the nave. Because of the placement, St. John is concealed from the eyes of the congregation and visible only to the monks³.

Regarding the interpretation of the theme, so far there is no agreement among the experts. There are two mainstream theories explaining the theme. According to the first theory, the fresco represents the apocalyptic vision St. John had on Patmos, namely, the representation of the Second Coming, as it is described in the Book of Revelation 1:7⁴. According to this view, it is understood that Correggio adhered in a formal sense to the ancient traditions of the dome-painting with a representation of Christ's Ascension as the Second Coming, just like on the dome of

* This paper is based on the Japanese version printed in *Bigaku* 66, No. 2 (2015), pp. 25-36, published by the Japanese Society for Aesthetics.

¹ For the Cassinese Congregation, see the following bibliography: B. Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua*, Oxford, 1985; M. Zaggia, *Tra Mantova e la Sicilia nel Cinquecento: La congregazione benedettina cassinese nel Cinquecento*, vol. 2, Firenze, 2003.

² For general information about the monastery of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma, see: B. Adorni (a cura di), *L'abbazia benedettina di San Giovanni Evangelista a Parma*, Parma, 1979. Especially in the early 16th century: C. Steinhardt-Hirsch, *Correggios »Notte«: Ein Meisterwerk der italienischen Renaissance*, München-Berlin, 2008, pp. 146-152.

³ J. Shearman, *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, 1992, p. 184.

⁴ P. Bianconi, *Tutta la pittura del Correggio*, Milano, 1953, p. 16; S. Bottari, *Correggio*, Milano, 1961, p. 22; A. C. Quintavalle, *L'opera complete del Correggio*, Milano, 1970, pp. 97-99, n. 49; C. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, London, 1976, p. 67; J. Shearman, "Correggio's Illusionism", in M. D. Emiliani (a cura di), *La prospettiva rinascimentale: codificazioni e trasgressioni*, atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Milano, 11-15 ottobre 1977), Firenze, 1980, pp. 281-294, esp. pp. 283-284.



Fig. 1
Correggio, *The Second Coming*,
Dome painting of the church of San
Giovanni Evangelista, Parma, 1520-
21. Photograph by author.

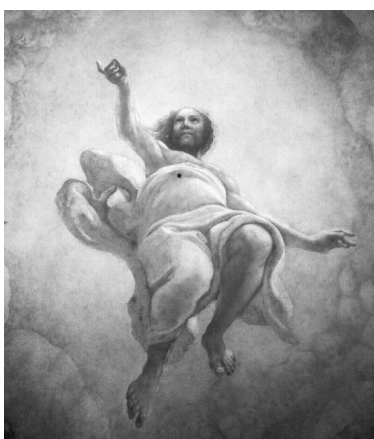


Fig. 2
Detail of Christ.

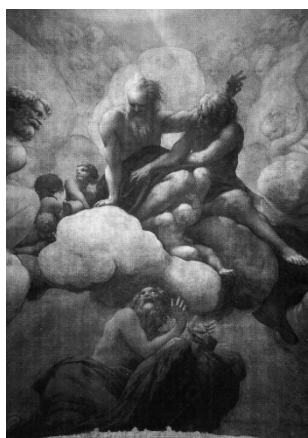


Fig. 3
St. John Evangelist depicted at
the west end of the dome (a
detail of Fig. 1).
D. Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, New
Haven-London, 1997.

Haghia Sophia, Thessaloniki in the 9th century. However, the scene of the ceiling painting where Jesus is accompanied by his disciples does not coincide with the description in the Book of Revelation, and there is no other example of an art work with the same theme.

The other interpretation is focused exactly on this representation, that is Christ with disciples. According to the second theory, the painting represents the Assumption of St. John as narrated in the Golden Legend⁵. St. Isidore of Seville explains that at the age of 99, St. John was visited by Christ and the other apostles and invited to their feast in heaven. Even before Correggio, this subject of St. John's Assumption had not been an uncommon in art. Two of the most celebrated examples are Giotto's fresco in the Peruzzi Chapel in Santa Croce, and Donatello's relief in the

⁵ V. Pignoli, "La cupola di S. Giovanni Evangelista a Parma", *Arte Cristiana*, 15, 1913, pp. 116-122; A. G. Quintavalle, *Gli affreschi del Correggio in San Giovanni Evangelista a Parma*, Milano, 1962, pp.13-14; G. M. Toscano, *Nuovi studi sul Correggio*, Parma, 1974, pp.55-61; E. Battisti, in Adorni, *op. cit.*, 1979, pp. 119-124; G. Ercoli, *Arte e fortuna del Correggio*, Modena, 1982, pp. 19-20; P. Mendogni, *Il Correggio a Parma*, Parma, 1989, pp. 57-60.

Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo, both in Florence. However, while they represented St. John moving to heaven, Correggio depicted the figure of St. John who is still on the ground, separated by a layer of clouds. This feature deviating from the iconographical tradition has not been fully discussed.

Thus, this ceiling painting has been interpreted either as the Second Coming (the Apocalyptic Vision of St. John) or the Assumption of St. John. However, I propose a different interpretation. I performed a detailed examination of the content of the Psalms and prayers prescribed in the Cassinese breviary for the liturgy of the feast of St. John (December 27), the saint patron of the church⁶. The breviary from 1506⁷ follows the interpretation of the John's Gospel 21:20-23 implying that St. John would not die, but would be accepted by Christ at the Second Coming in the Last Judgement. It is precisely because of this liturgy that it can be understood that in the fresco we can actually see the *Assumption of St. John* combined with the *Second Coming*. In addition, while examining the views of the work from different viewing points, I confirmed that Correggio, taking into account the meaning of the subject, has formulated an idea that the *Second Coming* was given to the laity in the nave, and the *Assumption of St. John* was to be observed only by the monks in the choir⁸. The figure of St. John, who sees God directly, would have been an ideal model, suitable only to the Cassinese monks who gave importance to inner meditation. Based on the above considerations, I concluded that the fresco shows both the *Assumption of St. John* and the *Second Coming*, although which aspect the viewer sees depends on the viewer's viewpoint in the church.

In this paper, based on this new interpretation, focusing on the iconographical features that have been overlooked so far, especially found in the figure of Christ, I will examine the meaning of those features that the painter originally intended. Correggio's Christ (Fig. 1) is not similar to the Christ of the *Ascension / Second Coming* (Thessaloniki, Hagia Sophia, 9th century) to which Shearman compared Correggio's⁹. It is also different from the *Majestas Domini* (Fig. 4) which Toscano showed as the source of Correggio's Christ¹⁰, or the Christ



Fig. 4
Majestas Domini, Cathedral de León, Spain, 11th century.
G. M. Toscano, *Nuovi studi sul Correggio*, Parma, 1974.

⁶ M. Yurikusa, "The dome painting of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma: The relationship between Correggio's form and content, depending on the viewer and the viewer's position", *Aesthetics*, 22, The Japanese Society for Aesthetics, 2018, pp. 55-69.
URL: http://www.bigakukai.jp/aesthetics_online/aesthetics_22/text22/text22_yurikusamariko.pdf, [2020/08/18]

⁷ *Breviarium monasticum secundum ritum et morem monachorum ordinis sancti benedicti de observantia cassinensis congregationis alius sancte iustine*, Venezia, 1506.

⁸ Yurikusa, *art. cit.*, 2018.

⁹ Shearman, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 156-158, 183.

¹⁰ Toscano, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 65.

appearing in the works depicted the Assumption of St. John¹¹. The feature of Correggio's depiction is that Christ wears pure white clothes. Because there are no examples of the same expression of Christ in these works, some researchers in past have interpreted this work as the Ascension of Christ¹² or the Resurrection of Christ¹³, in which Christ typically wears white clothes while showing his bare upper body and bare feet that emphasize his humanity. However, in previous studies, such early interpretations have been rejected because they do not explain the figure of St. John depicted at the west end of the dome and the Apostles on the clouds. Against that, in this paper, I will focus on the characteristic of the Christ's figure reminiscent of the theme of the Ascension or the Resurrection. Then, I will clarify its meaning and give the interpretation of this iconographic feature in relation to the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Fig. 12) in the apse of this church. It will be revealed how Correggio elaborated the figure of Christ considering the theme of the entire iconographic program of this church.

2. The *Second Coming* adopted the iconography of Transfiguration

2.1. The reconsideration of a previous interpretation

In the ceiling painting on the dome painted by Correggio, the golden light of the holy light dyes the sky and clouds. The light that shines the strongest and brightest around Christ is gradually relaxed as it moves away from the center, and changes to warm colors to illuminate the clouds that form the cherubim. This expression has been pointed out to have a formal relationship to Raphael's *Transfiguration* (1518-20) (Fig. 5)¹⁴. John Shearman, in particular, focusing on the relationship between the clouds and divine light in the ceiling painting and that of Raphael's work from a theological perspective, discussed Correggio's borrowing Raphael's elements¹⁵. Shearman's view that Correggio intentionally adopted the clouds and light motifs that appear in Raphael's *Transfiguration* is the key to



Fig. 5 Raphael, *The Transfiguration*, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City, 1518-20. © Archivi Alinari, Firenze / distributed by AMF.

¹¹ As precedent examples, in addition to Giotto and Donatello, there are the *Assumption of St. John* painted by Giovanni del Biondo (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 1735-80), and Agnolo Gaddi (Pinacoteca, Vatican, 1390-95). See: L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, tome III/2, Paris, 1958, pp. 718-719.

¹² L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, tome II/2, Paris, 1957, p. 590; G. Schiller, *Iconographie der christlichen Kunst*, Bd. 3, Gütersloh, 1971, p. 164, fig. 517, 518.

¹³ A. E. Popham, *Correggio's Drawings*, London, 1957, p. 28; G. D. Wind, "The Benedictine Program in San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma", *The Art Bulletin*, 58, 1976, pp. 521-527.

¹⁴ Shearman, *art. cit.*, 1980, p. 284; *Id.*, "Raphael's Clouds, and Correggio's", in M. S. Hamoud, M. L. Strocchi (a cura di), *Studi su Raffaello*, atti del congresso internazionale di studi (Urbino-Firenze, 6-14 aprile 1984), vol. 1, 1987, pp. 657-668. in part. pp. 666-667; D. Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, New Haven-London, 1997, p. 100; Steinhardt-Hirsch, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 158.

¹⁵ Shearman, *art. cit.*, 1980, p. 284; *Id.*, *art. cit.*, 1987, pp. 666-667.

understanding the iconographical features of Correggio's *Second Coming*, so let's start with an overview of his discussion.

Shearman interpreted the subject of the ceiling painting as the *Vision of St. John on Patmos*. And he understood that the viewers in the nave would receive the apocalyptic vision that St. John saw on Patmos: "He will come in the clouds" (Revelation 1: 7). In this point, he observes the revelation of the glory of God, and explains that when Jesus comes again at the end of time, he will fully reveal his glory as God. On the other hand, the Transfiguration, from which Correggio seemed to have borrowed the form of Raphael, was also an event in which the appearance of Christ was changed by the glory of God. He appeared in front of his disciples on Mount Tabor with his face shining like the sun and white clothing (Matthew 17: 1-9; Mark 9: 2-10; Luke 9: 28-36). Clouds dyed by divine light spread widely in both the paintings of Correggio and Raphael. This concept of "glory" (the Hebrew "Kabod", in the New Testament is translated into the Greek "Doxa")¹⁶ is going back to the glory of Yahweh in the Old Testament, and is closely related to the theme of Transfiguration and Second Coming. In this regard, both works show the glory of God as portrayed in the Jewish tradition, using the cloud, one of the customary motifs of God's revelation and intervention in the Bible¹⁷. In addition, Shearman cited Raphael's *Ezekiel's Vision* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1518), which is more similar to the expression of Correggio's ceiling painting¹⁸. In this background, he understood that Correggio depicted the cloud as a motif that originated from the glory of the Old Testament.

Shearman's interpretation, which acknowledges Correggio's borrowing from the form of Raphael's *Transfiguration* in this ceiling painting, is appropriate. However, his discussion, limited to the cloud and light motifs, does not take into account the iconographical program of this church. In this, he overlooked the most recognizable feature of Christ on the ceiling painting. Here, it is necessary to clarify why the figure of Christ in this work was adapted to the type that reminds of the Transfiguration.

2.2. The Transfiguration and the Second Coming of Christ

Originally, the Transfiguration of Christ is a theme that is closely related to the Second Coming in the Bible. The synoptic gospels describe that Jesus was divinely shining before the eyes of the three disciples, St. Peter, St. James and St. John, and that the disciples heard the voice of the Father telling them "He is my beloved Son". This event is said to have happened about a week after Jesus himself had foretold that he would suffer, die and resurrect, and would come again at the end of the world. St. Peter, one of the disciples who witnessed this event, presents the Transfiguration as a testimony of the Second Coming in his letter (Peter II, 1: 16-18).

¹⁶ A. M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, London, 1949; W. C. Loerke, "Observations on the Representation of Doxa in the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, and St. Catherine's, Sinai", *Gesta*, vol. 20, 1981, pp. 15-22.

¹⁷ W. K. Lowther Clarke, *Divine humanity: doctrinal essays on New Testament problems*, London, 1936, pp. 9-40.

¹⁸ Shearman, *art. cit.*, 1987, p. 667. Besides him, this idea is also taken up by A. G. Quintavalle, *op. cit.*, 1962, pp. 11-12; D. Arasse, *Les visions de Raphaël*, Paris, 2003, pp. 50-51. For this work, see the following references: C. K. Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, Pennsylvania, 2011, pp. 115-119.

Therefore, the Greek Fathers, such as St. John Chrysostom (344-407), generally understand the Transfiguration as a manifestation of Christ's divinity and as an event that prefigures Christ to come back at the Last Judgement¹⁹.

In addition, the relation between Correggio's ceiling painting representing the Second Coming and the theme of Transfiguration follows not only such general traditional theological interpretation, but it also specifically matches the specific context, namely, the Cassinese liturgy and the iconographic program of the church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma. The confirmation with the breviary published in 1506 and used in the monastery of the Cassinese Congregation, shows that besides Ps. 28th (29) which praises God the Father, the Psalms sung with the antiphon on the holiday of Christ's Transfiguration include Ps. 96th (97) related to the birth and return of Christ, and Ps. 23th (24) and 65th (66) related to the Resurrection, which recall Christ's Second Coming at the Last Judgment and reign of God²⁰. Additionally, as for the sermon of the Fathers of the Church, the one by St. Jerome (340?-420), which commented on the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew (16:27-28), is selected²¹. There, St. Jerome placed the event of Transfiguration in the apocalyptic context and clarified the meaning of Jesus' words related to his Passion and Death, seen in the light of the subsequent events of the Resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment.

Furthermore, in 1556 the *Transfiguration* (Fig. 6) by Gerolamo Bedoli (c. 1500-1569) was installed as the main altarpiece of the church of the monastery²². Although it was painted about thirty years after Correggio's ceiling painting, the existence of this altarpiece is another proof that the Second Coming was related to the Transfiguration at that time. Regarding the choice of Transfiguration for the altarpiece placed below the ceiling painting of the dome that had already presented the Second Coming, it has been verified that the Transfiguration was interpreted as the event in relation to eschatology and soteriology in this monastery. Also, in following Raphael's



Fig. 6 Gerolamo Bedoli, *The Transfiguration*, San Giovanni Evangelista, Parma, 1555-56.

B. Adorni (a cura di), *L'abbazia benedettina di San Giovanni Evangelista a Parma*, Parma, 1979.

¹⁹ G. Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, Bd. 1, Gütersloh, 1966, pp. 155-161. in part. p. 156; J. A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, New York, 1986, pp. 109-113, 120-122, 172-176.

²⁰ *Breviarium*, 1506, fol. 362r, v. In addition to the Psalms listed in the text, the 45th (46), 46 (47), 47 (48), 83 (84), 89 (90), 94 (95), 95 (96), 97 (98), 98 (99) were read on the Holiday of Transfiguration. For the interpretation of each psalm and its position in liturgy, see the following references: J. M. Neale and R. F. Littledale, *A commentary on the Psalms: from primitive and medieval writers, and from the various office-books and hymns of the Roman, Mozarabic, Ambrosian, Gallican, Greek, Coptic, Armenian and Syrian rites*, London, 1884 (reprint 1976).

²¹ *Breviarium*, 1506, fol. 363v, 364r. St. Jerome's sermon can be found in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, tome 26, Paris, 1845, col. 121. (See below for English translation: *St. Jerome. Commentary on Matthew*, trans. T. P. Scheck, Washington. D.C., 2008, pp. 196-197.)

²² L. F. Schianchi, in Adorni, *op. cit.*, 1979, pp. 154-162, esp. p. 158. Regarding the circumstances of the installation of the altarpiece at that time: Toscano, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 66.

Transfiguration (Fig. 5), Bedoli is clearly conscious of the continuity with the ceiling painting of Correggio that enters into viewer's sight at the same time. Therefore, when presented together, it is possible that Bedoli's altarpiece and Correggio's ceiling painting, which both refer to Raphael's *Transfiguration*, reveal the theme of Transfiguration / Second Coming included in each work.

We can find some examples of similar merging of these two themes in Byzantine arts, such as the work of the apse in the Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (c. 565), the apsis mosaic of church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe (c. 549), and Dalmatika of Charlemagne (14th century). In the apse of the Saint Catherine, the Transfiguration of Christ is represented together with the type of *Deesis* (in which a lamb with a cross on the back and a medallion of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist on the left and right are represented), implying the intercession in the Last Judgement²³. In the Apsis Mosaic of the church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna, a huge cross symbolizing the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the time is depicted²⁴. By including Moses and Elijah, and a hand symbolizing God the Father, the painting also implies the moment of the Transfiguration. In Dalmatika, the front is decorated with the *Second Coming*, and the back with the *Transfiguration*. Greenstein referred to this garment that was stored in the Papal Treasury at the time, and considered the thematical relation between the Second Coming and the Transfiguration in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (Vatican, Sistine Chapel, 1536-41)²⁵. As seen in these works, the combination of Second Coming and Transfiguration is also found in the ceiling painting and the altarpiece in the church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma.

Regarding Correggio's painting, as mentioned above, referring to the breviary and liturgy of the Cassinese Congregation, I have examined Shearman's interpretation, in which he identified the theme of the ceiling painting as the Vision of St. John on Patmos, and confirmed that the image was not the Vision of St. John on Patmos, but the Assumption of St. John. Although the previous studies don't stress it, the theme of the Assumption of St. John is closely related to the resurrection of the dead at the end of times. In the following part, based on my interpretation that the ceiling painting shows the *Assumption of St. John* to the viewer of the choir, while the *Second Coming* is presented to the public faithful of the nave, I will focus on Correggio's intention, which used the iconographical type of the Transfiguration.

3. The hidden theme in the ceiling painting: Resurrection of Christ / of the Elect

3.1. The iconographical type associated with the Resurrection

The characteristic of Raphael's *Transfiguration* (Fig. 5), on which the formal similarity of the Correggio's ceiling painting is focused, is the representation of transfiguring Christ floating in the air. There is no such description in the Bible, and his early conception related to this work depicts Christ with the feet on the ground, according to the biblical description (Giulio Romano,

²³ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Bd. 1, 1966, p. 158, fig. 407.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 156-158, fig. 405.

²⁵ J. M. Greenstein, "How Glorious the Second Coming of Christ": Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" and the Transfiguration," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 10, no. 20, 1989, pp. 33-57. in part. p. 41.

Albertina Museum, Vienna)²⁶. As previous researchers have pointed out²⁷, the completed work, in which Christ spreads his hands wide and floats in the air with his gaze upward, is reminding of the Resurrection and the Ascension that occurred after the Transfiguration, and the Second Coming when he will appear again in the same way as at Ascension. Prior to Raphael, Perugino also portrayed Christ of Transfiguration reminiscent of the Resurrection and the Ascension floating in the air with both hands open (Fig. 7). This iconography of the Transfiguration which combines the elements of the Resurrection and the Ascension / Second Coming is derived from Italian traditions, in which these three themes are overlapping each other²⁸. It should be noted that the feature of Christ in the *Second Coming* in Correggio's ceiling painting, which in the past had been interpreted either as the Resurrection or the Ascension, had this background for its creation.

In the middle of the 14th century, especially in Italy, when the Resurrection of Christ was depicted, artists adopted the iconographical type of the Ascension and the Transfiguration²⁹. Early examples of such expressions include the works by Andrea da Firenze (Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 1366-67) and Nicolo di Pietro Gelini (Fig. 8). There, by floating the Christ of Resurrection in the air, both the Ascension and the Second Coming (in which the same figure as in the Ascension is used) are implied, and at the same time, by enclosing the figure of Christ in the mandorla, it is also associated with the Transfiguration. In the 15th century, Andrea Mantegna also wrapped the figure of resurrected Christ with a mandorla and overlaid it on the



Fig. 7 Perugino, *The Transfiguration*, Collegio del Cambio, Perugia, 1497-1500.

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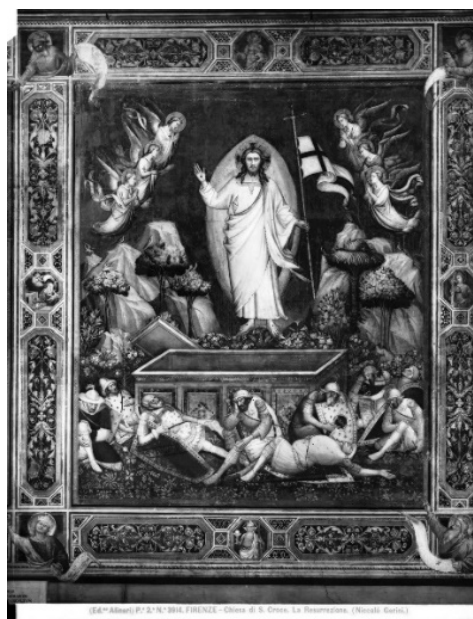


Fig. 8 Nicolo di Pietro Gerini, *The Resurrection*, Santa Croce, Florence, c. 1370. © Archivi Alinari, Firenze / distributed by AMF.

²⁶ For the sketches of Raphael's *Transfiguration*: K. Oberhuber, "Vorzeichnungen zu Raffaels »Transfiguration«", *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, IV, 1962, pp. 116-149.

²⁷ Réau, *op. cit.*, tome II/2, Paris, 1957, p. 577; Schiller, *op. cit.*, Bd. 1, 1966, p. 161; Arasse, *op. cit.*, 2003, pp. 64-66.

²⁸ Réau, *op. cit.*, tome II/2, 1957, pp. 547-548, 576-580, 586.

²⁹ Réau, *op. cit.*, tome II/2, 1957, p. 547; Schiller, *op. cit.*, Bd. 3, 1971, pp. 81-82.

image of Transfiguration (Fig. 9). Fra Angelico (Convent of San Marco, Florence, 1440-42), Pintoricchio (Appartamento Borgia, Palazzi Vaticani, Rome, 1492-94), and Perugino (Fig. 10) also adopted this type. Giovanni Bellini (Fig. 11), in place of mandorla, used a cloud. They used the figure of Christ floating over the grave, suggesting that he will ascend / return in the future. Further, by expressing the stunning light emitted from his body, they also referred to the Transfiguration. In other words, the element of the Resurrection, Transfiguration, and Ascension / Second Coming present in the abovementioned works was used interchangeably, because all those events are related to the nature of Christ revealing his divinity while retaining his humanity³⁰. Therefore, considering such context, it is inferred that the Christ in Correggio's *Second Coming* functioned as a figure reminiscent of Transfiguration, Ascension, and, especially, of Resurrection, all at the same time.



Fig. 9
Mantegna, *The Resurrection*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tours, 1459. © RMN-Grand Palais / Agence Bulloz / distributed by AMF.



Fig. 10 Perugino, *The Resurrection*, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City, 1499.
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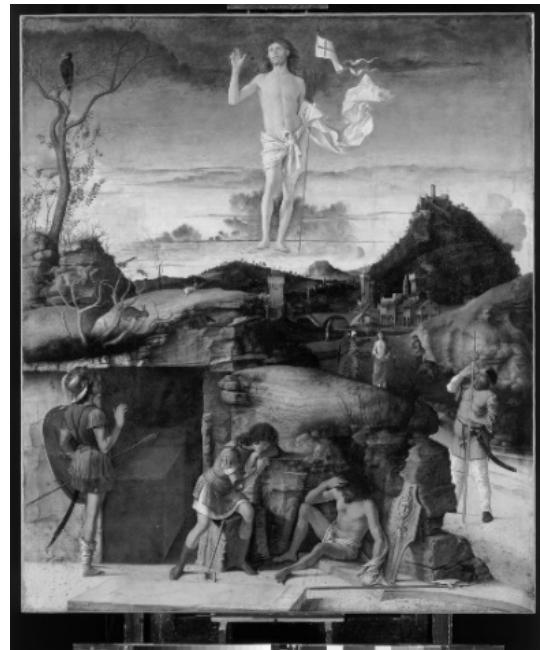


Fig. 11 Giovanni Bellini, *The Resurrection*, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1475-79.
© bpk / Gemäldegalerie, SMB / Jörg P. Anders / distributed by AMF.

³⁰ The themes of Transfiguration, Resurrection, and Ascension were all the main themes of Christ with a mandorla in Byzantine art: W. Messerer, "Mandorla", in *Lexikon der christliche Ikonographie*, Bd. 3, Rom-Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1971, cols. 147-149; F. Bøespflug, *Dieu et ses images: Une histoire de l'Éternel dans l'art*, Montrouge, 2008, pp. 131-132.

3.2. The relationship between Christ and St. John in the dome

In the theological interpretation of Transfiguration, as St. John Chrysostom and St. Jerome showed, the figure of Christ who transfigured in front of his disciples foreshadows the figure of Christ who will return at the Last Judgement³¹. In this respect, it can be consistent with the fact that Correggio has adopted the iconographical type of the Transfiguration for the *Second Coming* of the ceiling painting. On the other hand, the Transfiguration of Christ that manifested his divinity while maintaining the material of the human body, foreshadows his Resurrection, and, at the same time, it has been also understood as the event related to the resurrection of the Elect at the Last Judgement. According to Bede Venerabilis (673-735), the Transfiguration, in which Christ was glorified in his body on earth, was the event through which he promised to show his glory in his resurrected body at the Second Coming; in the same way, it was an event that foreshadowed the glory that the Blessed will ultimately attain³². Bede's interpretation that the Transfiguration would be a prefiguration of Beatitude itself was widely spread by St. Rabanus Maurus Magentius (c. 780-856), St. Anselmus of Canterbury (1033-1109), and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)³³. In particular, those appearing at the Transfiguration, namely, the two figures from the Old Testament, Elijah and Moses, representing the times before the Law and the times of the Law, and the three disciples who witnessed it, representing the times of Grace, would be treated as persons who will be glorified by God. Thus, it has been understood that the Transfiguration was a preview both of glory of Christ at the Second Coming, and the glory into which the Elect will be resurrected³⁴.

With this theological background, the image of Christ located in the dome has a special meaning. This figure of Christ (Fig. 2), containing the elements of both Transfiguration and Resurrection, faces St. John (Fig. 3). Like with Virgin Mary, some theologians interpreted that the body of this beloved disciple, St. John, was free from corruption and was carried to heaven with his soul³⁵. The painting on the west side of the dome, showing St. John being taken to heaven by Christ who appeared on the earth again, is an image that promises the resurrection of the Elect at the time of the Last Judgment. In this context, the Transfigured Christ is presented as an image that is linked not only to the appearance of Christ, but also to the appearance of the faithful saved at the end of the world.

Therefore, it can be understood that the background of Correggio's adaption of the type of Transfiguration in the ceiling of the dome was closely related to the themes of the Resurrection

³¹ Shearman, *art. cit.*, 1980, p. 284; McGuckin, *op. cit.*, 1986, pp. 120-122, 172-176, 269-274; Shearman, *art. cit.*, 1987, p. 666; Greenstein, *art. cit.*, 1989, p. 44.

³² McGuckin, *op. cit.*, 1986, pp. 290-292; Greenstein, *art. cit.*, 1989, pp. 44-45. See below for Bede's comment on the Matthew (16:27-17:9): *Bede the Venerable. Homilies on the Gospels*, vol. 1, trans. L. T. Martin, D. Hurst, Kalamazoo, 1991, pp. 234-244.

³³ Greenstein, *art. cit.*, 1989, pp. 45-46.

³⁴ McGuckin, *op. cit.*, 1986, pp. 122-125; Greenstein, *art. cit.*, 1989, pp. 44-45.

³⁵ See below for the discussions of St. John's Assumption: M. Jugie, *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge*, Studi e testi, 114, Città del Vaticano, 1944, pp. 710-726; J. D. Kaestli, "Le rôle des textes bibliques dans la genèse e le développement des légendes apocryphes," *Augustinianum*, 23, 1983, pp. 319-336; J. F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 2002, pp. 147-164.

of Christ and the resurrection of the Elect at the end of time. The *Second Coming* includes the theme of salvation from death that will be realized at the end of time.

3.3. The figure of Christ in the Apse

The unique figure of Christ depicted in the apse in the church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma can also be understood in the same way as the one on the ceiling of the dome.

Following the ceiling painting, Correggio began to paint the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Fig. 12) on the apse around 1522³⁶. Like the Assumption of St. John, the Coronation of the Virgin is closely related to the apocalyptic theme of Assumption of the Virgin, who was taken into heaven with both soul and body³⁷. Also, this subject is closely related to human salvation in that it anticipates and guarantees the resurrection of the chosen people. It should be noted here that in the *Coronation of*



Fig. 12 Correggio, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma, 1522.

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the Virgin, Correggio also depicted Christ in the manner that deviates from its iconographical tradition. As already pointed out in previous studies³⁸, the figure of Christ in the apse, who is wearing a cloak on the naked upper body, also adopts the type of Christ of Resurrection as in the ceiling painting. By using this form, the *Coronation of the Virgin* in apse also presents the glory of God who has the same physical body as human beings. There, a historical relationship has been suggested that the incarnation of the Son of God enables human salvation.

4. Conclusion

As for the interpretation of the entire program of the church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma, Toscano's positioning of the ceiling painting has been basically accepted in previous studies without being examined in detail. Based on the above-mentioned considerations regarding Christ's two natures (divinity and humanity), I would like to reexamine his interpretation.

Toscano interpreted the theme of the ceiling painting as the Assumption of St. John, and he understood that through using the theme of the vision of Christ which St. John saw just before death, in accordance with the medieval dome decoration, the ceiling presents Christ's divinity³⁹. Namely, by adapting the traditional form of the *Majestas Domini*, the decoration of the dome is

³⁶ Toscano, *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 30-32; Ekserdjian, *op. cit.*, 1997, pp. 95-121.

³⁷ P. Verdier, *Le couronnement de la Vierge: Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique*, Paris, 1980; J-C. Schmitt, "L'Exception corporelle: à propos de l'Assomption de Marie", in J. F. Hamburger, A-M. Bouché (eds.), *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, 2006, pp. 151-185.

³⁸ F. Büttner, "Correggios "Marienkrönung" in San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma", in K. Bergdolt e G. Bonsanti (a cura di), *Opere e giorni. Studi su mille anni di arte europea dedicati a Max Seidel*, Venezia, 2001, pp. 485-498, in part. pp. 491-492.

³⁹ Toscano, *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 55-61.

related to the divine nature of Christ. On the other hand, the side arches of pendentives, in which the themes of the Old Testament are represented as the prefigure of Christ physical events: Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, are praising his human nature⁴⁰. According to Toscano, this theme related to his humanity is also repeated in the frieze decoration of the nave walls, where the arrival of the Savior and his life is foretold through the prophets of Old Testament and the pagan sybils⁴¹. Thus, Toscano considered Christ's divinity and humanity separately, and he also divides the themes of decoration on the architectural parts: He separates the theme of divinity, occupying the dome, from the theme of humanity in the pendentives and nave walls. Within this framework, he interpreted the themes from the ceiling painting of the dome to the pendentives and nave wall as those related to the Logos (dome) and its Incarnation (pendentive, nave wall). And there, he pointed out the close relation with the Mass at the real altar in this church⁴².

However, he neglects the characteristics of the figure of Christ on the dome that recalls the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, as considered in this paper. The Transfiguration and the Resurrection are related to both Christ's natures, not only his divinity as Toscano has interpreted it⁴³. Based on the considerations made in this paper, his interpretation should be revised from the following two perspectives.

First, the dome painting shows not only the divinity of Christ, but also his humanity, both natures of Christ that are essential for Redemption. In the dome, the *Second Coming* is presented to the viewer in the nave, and the *Assumption of St. John* is presented to the viewer in the choir. The iconographical type of Transfiguration used in the ceiling painting suggests not only the Resurrection of Christ himself, but also the resurrection of the Elect at the end of time. This point is closely related to the Cassinese view of salvation. The monks of the Congregation, following the Greek Fathers, especially St. Chrysostom, and from the western tradition, particularly St. Augustine stressed a pattern of salvation through the "restoration" of human nature now broken by mortality to the state before the original sin⁴⁴. According to the monks, human salvation lays primarily in the rescue from mortality and the restoration of shattered human nature to health by Christ⁴⁵. In the church, this fact was clearly shown by overlaying the image of Christ on the dome and the apse with the image of Resurrection, and also by including the image of St. John who is saved by that Christ.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 62-81. The four arches that support the four pendentives have one theme on each base, totaling eight following themes: *Aaron with a Flowering Staff* and *Moses in front of the Burning Bush*, *Sacrifice of Isaac* and *Abel Killed by Cain*, *Jonah Spouted from the Mouth of a Large Fish* and *Samson Pulling out the Gate of Gaza*, *Elijah on Chariots of Fire* and *Enoch Taken Away to Heaven*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 88. The nave frieze of the church is divided into thirteen sections, and on each side of each section there are seats of Old Testament prophets and pagan sybils with the prophecies and promises of Jesus' life. In the center of the composition, there are alternately the scene of the lamb sacrifice representing the ritual of Old Testament and the pagan altar, which St. Paul found engraved with "Unknown God" in Athens (Acts 17:23). Toscano understood that the theme of these images in the nave is related to the sacrifice of Christ and honors his humanity (pp. 93-101.)

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 66-68.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁴ Collett, *op. cit.*, 1985, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

Secondly, therefore, the theme of the ceiling painting is inseparable from that of the pendentives and nave decorations. The glory of Christ with the resurrected body is presented in the dome, and it was acquired after the passion and the death presented in the pendentives and nave. Considering the fact that the emphasis of the nave's frieze (where the life of Jesus is told through the inscriptions of the prophets and the sybils) is on this passion and death⁴⁶, there is a close relation between the nave and choir decorations of the church. Thus, the church of San Giovanni Evangelista contains a holistic iconographic program that shows the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ having both divine and human natures, with the theme of the relationship between God and humans. It seems that Correggio, who had a particular relationship with the Cassinese Congregation, understood the meaning of this program and painted the *Second Coming* on the dome in a way which specifically contained the themes of Transfiguration and Resurrection.

⁴⁶ Of the total of 26 inscriptions of prophets and sybils, 14 are associated with Christ's Passion and Death.

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