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PAPAL POLITICS AND RAPHAEL'S STANZA DELLA SEGNATURA AS PAPAL GOLDEN AGE

Robert Baldwin

Associate Professor of Art History

Connecticut College

New London, CT 06320

robert.baldwin@conncoll.edu

www.socialhistoryofart.com

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Raphael as an Artist

The great assimilator of the best of Leonardo's drama and rhythmic figural groupings, Michelangelo's heroic muscular nudes, and the coloristic atmosphere of Venetian painting, Raphael constantly developed his style, adding to its compositional unity, figural power, and optical richness. As a young artist, he gradually made a name by painting small Madonnas, studying Leonardo's tonal style, heroic forms, dramatic grouping, and pyramidal compositions. Typical of Raphael was his greater simplicity and clarity compared to Leonardo's endlessly detailed, darkly shadowed, mysterious works. Yet Raphael would periodically return to Leonardo's rich shadows throughout his career as if aware of the potential boredom in clarity, harmony, and symmetry.

Raphael, Stanze della Segnatura: Disputa, School of Athens, Parnassus, 1509-12

School of Athens (Philosophy; ceiling fresco: Apollo and Marsyas)

Disputa (Theology; ceiling fresco: Adam and Eve)

Parnassus (Poetry; ceiling fresco: Urania). The oak trees growing right behind Apollo are the heraldic emblem of the patron, Julius II, and appear elsewhere as ornament and on the papal coat of arms in the center of the ceiling.

Law (Byzantine emperor, Justinian d. 5565 AD; Gregory IX Hands the Decretals to Raimondo of Penaforte; ceiling fresco: Judgment of Solomon. Gregory has the face of Julius II and is flanked by members of Julius' court

Papal Patronage and Politics

No Renaissance pope did more to cement the spiritual and worldly authority of the papacy than Julius II. Among other things, he led the papal army to subdue his home town of Bologna and annex that region to the Papal States, already a large territory primarily in central Italy. To commemorate his victory, he had a medal struck comparing himself to Julius Caesar.¹ He was also known for quashing a high-level rebellion against his spiritual authority mounted by bishops and cardinals who convened the Council of Pisa in 1510-11 in an attempt to depose Julius. He prevailed over his opponents in part by convening and presiding over the Fifth Lateran Council in 1511. Needless to say, no dissent or controversy appears in Raphael's *Disputa*. Instead, a strong vertical axis binds various levels of heaven and earth into a single, eternal agreement.

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Called to Rome by Pope Julius II as part of a team of painters asked to fresco four papal apartments, Raphael was at first an assistant to a more established artist of the day, Bramante. When Julius II saw the little peripheral scenes painted by Raphael, he fired Bramante and put Raphael in charge of the whole project. Here is a good example of the Renaissance idea of progress, the increased competition between artists, and the new pressure to stay on top of the latest developments or risk losing the most prestigious commissions.

*The Papal Library as Humanist Allegory of the Golden Age*ⁱⁱ

The first room, the Stanza della Segnatura as we know it today, was then the pope's private library, separate from the semi-public Vatican Library founded by his uncle, Pope Sixtus IV. As was traditional, the books in the pope's library were divided into four branches of knowledge: theology, philosophy, law, and poetry. The layout of the frescoes followed medieval allegories of the liberal arts with personifications of intellectual categories above and depictions of famous authors below. The frescoes also harkened back to classical libraries, known through literary descriptions, which were decorated with portraits of famous writers.

While the general scheme was traditional, the context was new. Like a growing number of Renaissance patrons eager to display the more worldly intellectual ambition of Renaissance humanism, Julius II used lavish patronage of learning and the arts to increase his prestige and secure his eternal fame in history. Here we might remember the example of Federico da Montefeltro, the humanist Duke of Urbino, Isabella d'Este, the Marquise of Mantua, Pope Sixtus IV, who started the Vatican Library and commemorated it with a large fresco, and Lorenzo de' Medici, the humanist poet and patron of Botticelli's mythological allegories. All exemplified the new humanism proudly displayed by patrons of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Although late medieval patrons were eager to display literary-musical talents as part of a larger world of "noble" mind, it was the cultural revolution of Renaissance humanism which gave court, church, and burgher patrons new permission to celebrate their learning with an unapologetic emphasis on secular knowledge and a new sense of worldly pride.

Julius II had already made significant contributions to the official Vatican library started by Sixtus IV. The main purpose of the smaller, personal library was to display the pope's learning and patronage in more personal terms, on the one hand, and with much greater allegorical complexity on the other. Humanists working for Julius II flattered the pope by comparing his court to a new Athens, Rome, or Mt. Parnassus where Apollo and the Muses inspired all poetic achievement. This rhetoric of renewal was all part of the humanist discourse of the "Golden Age," in particular, the cultural rebirth or renaissance brought by a new ruler as noted in our discussion of Botticelli's *Primavera*. Parnassus was a particularly appealing reference for intellectually inclined rulers in Roman antiquity and in early modern Europe. Apollo on Parnassus had already appeared on the frontispiece of the poems of Lorenzo de' Medici (1480s), in the courtly mythologies painted by Mantegna in the 1490s for Isabella d'Este, and in the 1533 wedding festivities of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn.ⁱⁱⁱ By painting Apollo surrounded by the

Muses and the great poets of Western history running down to members of the papal court, Raphael implicitly hailed Julius II as a god-like, ruling mind whose library and larger patronage of humanist culture and arts restored a new Golden Age of learning encompassing all branches of human knowledge.^{iv}

Since Renaissance humanism began as an educational reform redefining the liberal arts with a new focus on classical learning reconciled with Christian thinking, Raphael's frescoes also suggested the new curriculum defined here by church humanism. Here was an authoritative list of "great" thinkers and books, a "universal" core curriculum running from pagan and Christian antiquity to the Italian humanist present (as seen in the portraits of contemporary writers).

As with all definitions of knowledge and education, social and political values were subtly present, informing the choices and structuring the presentation of knowledge. In this case, Raphael's universe of knowledge was defined by the political and intellectual values of the Renaissance papacy in Raphael's frescoes. All four frescoes have a distinctly hierarchical structure made explicit, in papal terms, in the fresco of *Law* where binding wisdom comes down at left from the Byzantine emperor and lawmaker, Justinian, and, at right, from Pope Gregory IX who displays the face of Julius II. The same values inform the *Disputa* and *Parnassus* where enduring truth descends from celestial deities, in particular, the Holy Trinity, whose unquestioned authority popes traditionally appropriated, and Apollo, whose solar and cosmic-musical rule alludes to the cultivated patronage of Julius II.

Classical Dialogue and Renaissance Papal Hierarchy

In the *School of Athens*, philosophical truth unfolds from a linked pair of historical authorities, Plato and Aristotle, whose discussion suggests the human debate and struggle to find wisdom so often found in classical philosophy and embodied in the format of the dialogue used most famously by Plato. In contrast to the medieval treatise where truth descends from a single, God-like author, Renaissance humanism restored the dialogue format with its more open ended, critical, and relatively tolerant approach to knowledge. This more open discussion even appears in the world of religious knowledge in Raphael's *Disputa* though that fresco displays a more hierarchical composition tied to traditional Christian ideas of knowledge as revelation.

The new openness to multiple viewpoints and authorities does not mean Raphael should be confused with a modern relativist. Even in the more diffused composition of the *School of Athens* with its multiple authorities spread out across the composition, the potential discord and disagreement of multiple voices was carefully subordinated to the larger, unifying, compositional and intellectual authority of Plato and Aristotle who were raised up above the other thinkers, placed in the symbolic center, and sanctified by the celestial heavens which grant them the humanist equivalent to a halo. The compositional device of steps used by Raphael also drew on traditional metaphors in philosophy and theology for hierarchy, intellectual progress, and ascent toward the sacred. (One thinks of fifteenth and early sixteenth-century devotional prints which show the soul ascending a ladder or staircase toward an enthroned God.)

In their rhetoric of divine wisdom and authority passed down to earthly authorities such as popes, Raphael's four frescoes parallel Michelangelo's frescoes on the Sistine Ceiling where divine thought and authority descends from God the Father to human prophets and sibyls and, by implication, to the popes who rule over that chapel. The historical dimension of Raphael's frescoes also paralleled the papal world history seen in the Sistine Chapel beginning with Genesis and the Noah story on the ceiling, and continuing with the Life of Moses and the Life of Christ on the wall frescoes painted for Sixtus IV in 1481 (Botticelli, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, etc.), Raphael's tapestries of the *Lives of the Apostles* (early Church) and proceeding to the end of time in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1530s). Raphael's library frescoes also offered a papal world history of theology, philosophy, poetry and law from authoritative beginnings down to the modern Italian popes, theologians, poets, and artists found in more recent Italian history (Dante, who appears twice, and Petrarch) and ending in the court of Julius II whose face appears in two of the papal portraits (*Law, Disputa*) and whose name is inscribed in the center of the *Disputa* on the altar itself. The presence of so many contemporary faces underscored the theme of a "Golden Age" in court of Julius II. As with the Sistine Chapel, ideas of papal authority and papal history come together.

Raphael, Disputa (Theology), Vatican, 1509

Introduction

The first of Raphael's frescoes, the *Disputa*, was really an image of theology and theological consensus and papal authority. *Disputa* means discussion, not dispute, and here the "discussion" is really the kind of universal affirmation of central church dogmas much beloved by popes of every age. (The fresco's name is really a nickname coined forty years later by the writer, Vasari.)

In contrast to the static and flat allegorical compositions of the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, Raphael dramatized his subject in line with the new artistic principles of Leonardo. In this way, he brought the central tenets of Christian theology to life with expressive and anatomically powerful figures. Although Early Renaissance perspectival space was still important, Raphael used Leonardo's new method of creating space out of three-dimensional, moving figures arranged in rhythmically entwined groups which sweep back behind the altar in a semi-circular pattern mimicking the apse behind the high altars of churches. Taking his cues from Leonardo (whose portrait is probably used for the face of Plato in the *School of Athens*), Raphael developed this highly original composition and handling of individual figures only after making numerous preliminary studies including drawings of figures seen in the nude.

Catholic Hierarchy as Unity, Harmony, Order

In the upper section, Raphael depicted a heavenly court governed by God the Father at the top, then Christ flanked by Mary and the Baptist, and then the disciples on a cloud just below. Set within a large circle of golden light decorated with the heads of seraphim, the young, blond Christ evokes classical images of Apollo surrounded by the cosmic band of zodiacal signs. Given the importance of Apollo to Golden Age discourse in humanist papal Rome at this point and his appearance as a ruling deity in Raphael's adjoining fresco of *Parnassus*, it is reasonable to see humanist parallels between the two deities. Indeed, comparisons between Christian and pagan lie at the heart of Renaissance humanism and Raphael's frescoes in this room, seen most vividly in the spiritual comparison between Theology (*Disputa*) and Philosophy (*School of Athens*). The latter pairing compares celestial and terrestrial wisdom and complements spiritual authorities in the earthly sphere.

Further down, we see the holy Dove flying down along with the four gospels toward the altar below where the Christ the Word is made flesh. (In general structural terms, this image offers an official church politics remarkably similar to that developed on the inside of van Eyck's *Ghent Altar*.) Flanking the altar below was an image of the terrestrial Church with central importance given to Jerome, Gregory, Augustine and Ambrose, major early theologians who defined church laws and doctrines and were singled out by the honorific title, Four Doctors of the Church. Here Raphael fused the sacramental idea of the descending word made flesh with the papal idea of theological authority descending from authoritative figures, especially popes, cardinal, bishops, and great theologians, all of them male. (With the exception of the subordinated and passive Muses and the prominent figure of Sappho in *Parnassus*, women are absent from all four frescoes just as they were largely banished from the official corridors of the "masculine" world of learning. Of course women writers existed at that time, as they do in every period, but they had a hard time finding a public voice.)

As the fresco made clear, the sacraments, scriptures, and laws of the Church came directly from divine authority and as such were beyond human criticism. If *Disputa* means discussion, not dispute, the fresco reminded its viewers that the laws and sacraments of the Catholic church descended from the infallible authority of a male deity, male theologians, and a male pope. No wonder Raphael placed so many church officials below. In this explicit appeal to papal authority, Raphael made theology and dogma visible, just as the wafer made visible the body of Christ. Although Raphael restricted most of the figures in the *Disputa* to important officials, he included a few lay people in a way which reinforced ecclesiastical hierarchies. The lay figures just behind the theologians to the left of the altar kneel and gesticulate dramatically, in striking contrast to the subdued demeanor of the theologians. Here Raphael distinguished between the higher mind of the Doctors of the Church and the subordinated, kneeling, awe-stricken piety of the lay. While great theologians like Jerome translate and interpret the Word of God, the ordinary worshipper lives in a lower world of emotional and visual faith tied to church ritual. Here papal mind rules over a lower, institutional body.

For all the hierarchical values, mind and body appeared here in a reassuring continuum, a descending scale embracing the whole of mankind just as the composition reaches out to include the real viewer with its "Catholic" (i.e. universal) institutional embrace. In a larger sense, all

Italian Renaissance art made transcendental ideas visible in an aesthetic of orderly, heroic naturalism. By fusing sacred and profane in a grand, classicizing manner, Renaissance art also reinforced worldly hierarchies of church and state.

Eucharistic Piety, Church Authority, and Papal Politics

On the altar itself, Raphael placed the central sacrament, Communion, seen in the wafer displayed in a monstrance. In the Mass (Communion), Christ's body came down miraculously from above into the bread in a ritual reenacting both his incarnational descent into the flesh – the Word made flesh as noted in the Gospel of John - and his eventual sacrifice on the "altar" of the cross. At a time when Christians received the sacrament only once a year on average, Communion was largely a visual ceremony with the Corpus Christi (Body of Christ) held up by the priest for visual adoration and prayer, or displayed in a monstrance.

Communion was the most central, unifying, and important ritual in all official Christianity since it made visible the church's power to mediate between mankind and God and to perform miracles. To believe in the Eucharist was to believe in the church as the source for grace on earth and the single, unifying path to salvation. Even before the Reformation, some late medieval and early Renaissance reform movements denied that church officials had the power to turn ordinary bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. To deny this miraculous power (transubstantiation) was to deny the whole structure of church power as an intermediating institution with a monopoly over grace, piety, faith, ritual practice, and salvation.

Since it was the priest who transformed bread and wine into Christ's body and blood on the altar, the miracle of communion made visible a divine power invested above all in the figure of the priest. And in papal culture, the pope was frequently likened to the High Priest or priest of all priests. If Eucharistic imagery worked in church art to reinforce ecclesiastical authority, the Eucharist in papal art referred more specifically to the supreme authority of the pope as chief priest of the Catholic church. Interestingly, the Eucharistic theme was absent from Raphael's earliest designs for the *Disputa* and entered into the composition only in the later stages, presumably at the suggestion of Julius II.

The same patron commissioned another large Eucharistic fresco from Raphael for the next room painted in the papal apartments, the *Stanza d'Eliodoro*. Here Julius II presided over the Mass at Bolsena, a late medieval Eucharistic miracle where a consecrated wafer bled profusely over the altar and banished the doubts of an ordinary German priest. Both frescoes used the Eucharist as a symbol promoting unity in one church, one God, one pope, one priest, and one ceremonial object. The *Disputa*, in particular, represented Eucharistic power descending hierarchically through the vested channels of the church through the papal priest into the Host itself. To buttress church hierarchy and authority, Raphael painted numerous popes, cardinals, and bishops while including ordinary Christians who Catholic theologians traditionally called the "members" of the church as a *Corpus Mysticum*, headed by Christ.

To flatter his patron as the high priest of the Church, Raphael painted the words *Julius II. Pontifex Maximus* along the top edge of the altar directly below the Eucharist. In this way he inscribed papal supremacy over the Eucharistic miracle, the Corpus Domini, and the corpus mysticum of the Roman Catholic church. The pope did the same thing when he opened the Fifth Lateran Council (1511) with the words, *Sumus Corpus Domini* (We are the Body of Christ).^v

Raphael, School of Athens (Philosophy), Vatican, 1508-9

Directly across from the *Disputa* was the *School of Athens*, another popular name for what was really "Philosophy". While the nickname refers to Plato's Academy in ancient Athens, the fresco gathers together all the famous philosophers of classical antiquity into a single, classical building to create an ideal school of philosophy.

Raphael was not the first person to compile a gathering of all the great pagan philosophers. Almost as soon as Dante enters Hell, he discovers a great fortress protecting a spacious, well-lit, green meadow where all the great classical philosophers and poets gather to converse. At the start of a late medieval Christian allegory of spiritual ascent, Dante displayed a remarkable proto-humanism by introducing into Hell a mini-paradise meadow where classical thinkers could discourse in a special zone free from torment. Most of Raphael's thinkers were already gathered in Dante's group which named twenty-seven men and eight women including Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Democritus, Diogenes, Zeno, Heraclitus, Orpheus, Cicero, Seneca, Euclid, Ptolemy, Hippocrates, Galen. Virgil, of course, is present as Dante's pagan guide.

While the earlier gathering of pagan thinkers reminds us that Renaissance originality always drew on pre-existing traditions, the classical thinkers assembled by Dante also helps us see how Raphael's assembly expresses the new humanist values of sixteenth century Italy as refracted through the lens of papal thinking. Whereas Dante could only glorify pagan thinkers if he first located them in Hell, sixteenth-century artists and patrons freely celebrated all manner of classical subjects without any Christian constraints. Indeed, the world of classical antiquity (and especially mythology) offered Renaissance Christian elites a fantasy world where they could shed their Christian morality and range freely through pagan landscapes of pleasure and delight.) Nor could Dante ever have imagined a time would soon come in the sixteenth century when rulers would have their portraits painted as classical deities and heroes.

Dante's gathering also helps us see the new Renaissance humanist culture of education, a theme made central to Raphael's School of Athens where most of the philosophers are busy teaching boy and younger men. Needless to say, this educational theme worked well in a set of frescos decorating a library and paying tribute to the humanistic education of the ideal prince, here Julius II.

A Closer Look at the School of Athens

As Sydney Freedberg noted many years ago, the composition in the *Disputa* mimicked the apse-like structure of a church while "Theology" appeared within a secular, classical building consistent with its focus on pagan thought. As Theology came unquestioned from God to the Church, so Philosophy was a construct of the human mind.

Plato and Aristotle walk out toward the viewer in the center, framed by architecture and silhouetted against a halo-like sky. Plato, who is modeled after Leonardo, points upward to his metaphysical realm of Ideas while Aristotle gestures downward to the earthly realm of politics and ethics explored in his writings. Both carry books, as do so many other figures in these library frescoes.

To the sides and below, Raphael introduced a slew of additional famous thinkers from antiquity, including Socrates to the left, modeled on classical busts. Famous for his ugliness, Socrates was also known for flirting with the beautiful young nobleman, Alcibiades, shown in armor to the left, in Platonic dialogues which hailed love between men as the most godlike, noble, and manly. (In Plato's view, it was heterosexual love which effeminized and weakened men.) Hovering over this erotically charged teaching relationship as a kind of patron saint is a Greek statue of Apollo, young, naked, sensual, and androgynous, carefully modeled on antique sculptures, and reminding educated viewers of that god's famous love affairs with young men (Hyacinth, Cyparissus) and of Greek educational ideas of (male) students initiated sexually by their teachers as part of a larger, all-encompassing teaching. A very different Apollo appeared in the contiguous fresco of *Parnassus*, here decorously dressed, less androgynous, and imbedded in a heterosexual grouping of the surrounding Muses. It is the striking differences between these two versions of Apollo which allow us to see that deity's special relationship to Socrates and Alcibiades in the *School of Athens*.

On the steps in the lower center, Diogenes the Cynic sprawls by himself to show his contempt for worldly conventions and his solitary life as a wandering, hermit philosopher living in a barrel and spurning all possessions save a beggar's cup. At the lower left, the mathematician, Pythagoras, kneels to write in a book. Democritus (Michelangelo) broods over a stone table in the center. Euclid (Bramante) uses a compass at the lower right, while above with globes stand Ptolemy and Zoroaster, conversing with Raphael himself (the young man who looks out at us). Here, Raphael shows himself as an intellectual artist, on the scientific side of Aristotle, under the inspiration of a sculpted Minerva (Wisdom), a cosmographer who understands the secrets of nature in his art. In this way he made visually explicit the new view of art and artist described in Leonardo's writings and implicit in his own art.

Seen philosophically, the frescoes of the *Stanza della Segnatura* displayed a new harmony between Theology and Philosophy, facing each other here not as opposites (which they were to a certain extent in the Middle Ages), but as complementary paths to wisdom. Thus the Italian Renaissance dreamed of a harmony between pagan and Christian. In a larger sense, the whole

room united Classical Philosophy and Poetry with Christian Theology and Law to express the divine harmony of the human mind where all knowledge could unite, like the frescoes, in a beautiful symmetry, in a single, ideal consciousness.

A Humanist Tribute to Michelangelo

On a more aesthetic note, it is interesting that Raphael's Democritus did not appear in the final cartoon (transfer drawing) for the fresco. Dissatisfied with the composition, which may have seemed too open in the front, Raphael added the Democritus by chopping out a section of the dry plaster wall and adding a fresh area of wet plaster painted with this seated philosopher. In so far as the Democritus displayed the gigantic, muscular anatomical forms developed by Michelangelo who was painting the nearby Sistine Chapel at the same time, Raphael's addition showed the rapid assimilation of the strengths and innovations of other artists into his own style, a striking feature of his artistry throughout his short but stylistically varied career. Raphael had already paid tribute to Leonardo by using his face for Plato. And he seems to have included the head of Bramante in his School of Athens. But Michelangelo was his greatest rival and a temperamental, boastful, jealous personality who would never have paid homage to a rival, especially one so talented as the young Raphael. On the other hand, Raphael was known for his sweetness, charm, civility and tact. He was hailed in his lifetime as a courtier artist, polite to all and universally beloved. For the young artist to paint his chief rival, Michelangelo, as the brooding philosopher, Heraclitus, while assimilating the heroic scale of his figures, was to pay striking homage to the powerful invention of Michelangelo's artistic mind. But it also signaled Raphael's own powers of assimilation, self-critique, and innovation. It must have irritated the proud Michelangelo to no end.

Raphael, Parnassus (Poetry), Vatican, 1509

As indicated above, Apollo on Parnassus explicitly allegorized the new cultural rebirth claimed for papal Rome under the rule of Julius II. Raphael visualized the connection between Apollo and the court of Julius by extending his composition down from the celestial heights of Mt. Parnassus to the pope's library where the beholder stands and into which the painted figures in front project illusionistically. Raphael also directed the famous spring which descends from Parnassus and flows here into the library, a spring which offers divine inspiration to all poets who drink its waters. As in the other four frescoes, Raphael also developed an historical continuum beginning with celestial figures, moving forward in time to the great minds of antiquity or the early Christian church, and continuing on in the theologians, poets, humanists, and writers assembled around Julius II whose portraits appear in the foreground. Finally Raphael also included papal emblems, above all, the oak tree which grows directly behind Apollo and quietly transfers all of his virtues to papal Rome. Fifteenth and sixteenth-century Italian writers described this humanist cultural renewal or Golden Age as a rebirth, a *rinascita*. Using a French term first introduced into cultural history in the nineteenth century, we call this a *renaissance*.

While we take Poetry for granted as a category of knowledge and especially as a classification for books, Poetry had little status in the Middle Ages due to the amorous subjects of so much classical poetry. In contrast to classical philosophy which was generally respected in the Christian Middle Ages, classical poetry, and poetry itself was frequently attacked as salacious, worldly and sinful. A few classical poets were hailed for their sober, manly morality like Virgil but poetry as a whole suffered a loss of status in the era when medieval monastic Christian values were dominant. While this didn't stop medieval court poets from producing a wide range of worldly, often salacious poems, the category of poetry lost much of its status. This changed in the later Middle Ages with the rise of chivalry (1200-) and the explosion of chivalric poems and romances exploring courtly love and the beginnings of serious vernacular Christian poetry seen in the late 13th and early 14th century poet, Dante.

With the comprehensive revival of classical authors and a more secular outlook, Renaissance humanism ushered in a new age of respect for poetry and an explosion of poetic writing. At the same moment as Botticelli created large mythological paintings, Italian humanists like Poliziano, and humanist patrons like Lorenzo de' Medici wrote and published hundreds of strikingly worldly poems modeled on classical authors and taking up classical mythological, pastoral, and amorous themes.

Gender Values in the Church and the Academy

By naming eight women, Dante's gathering of great classical thinkers and poets offered a more inclusive academy than the all-male world shown in Raphael's *Disputa* and *School of Athens*, and, to a lesser extent, in the *Parnassus*. In a book allegorizing the poet's spiritual pilgrimage toward a celestial perfection embodied in his beloved Beatrice and where courtly and Christian love softened, civilized, sanctified, and redeemed the sinful poet, it is not a surprise to find women in Dante's special sanctuary for thinkers. It is equally unsurprising to find women banished from Raphael's schools of Theology and Philosophy and reduced, in Poetry, to a single poetess and to the more generic Muses.

To be sure, Renaissance humanists often served as the private tutors to upper class women while educating their own daughters to very high levels (as with Thomas More). And a few humanists wrote treatises or letters stressing the importance of education for women. Despite these efforts, the world of Renaissance humanism was largely all-male, like the schools they founded and the classical writers they studied and translated. Indeed, even when humanists endorsed higher education for women, they defined the most important and serious areas of knowledge as masculine - theology, philosophy, politics, law, science, and history - while channeling women into more "feminine" subjects such as poetry, music, and devotional literature. This explains why there are no female authors or thinkers in the *Disputa*. The only woman allowed to appear in this allegory of Theology was the Virgin Mary who appears as Christ's subordinated, supplicating mother. In the world of high church culture, women marry. They give birth. They supplicate and

soften the stern hearts of powerful men. They obey. They do not presume to teach (as laid down by Paul). And they do not write. In the *School of Athens* which allegorized Philosophy, Raphael banished women altogether. Only Minerva was allowed in at right and only in the form of a statue.

Living women were only allowed into Raphael's ideal library (university) in *Parnassus*, the allegory of Poetry. They were welcome because poetry often dealt with the "feminine" sphere of emotion and love, especially lyric poetry. And poetry was closely linked to music which was also frequently gendered as "feminine". Even here, Raphael anchored music in the masculine authority of Apollo. And he placed the oak tree of Julius II behind Apollo to introduce another powerful man whose musical-poetic knowledge and wisdom is allegorized here and displayed below in his books.

But Raphael also paid tribute to the feminine art of music by including the nine Muses in the center of the composition. In contrast to Apollo, who is largely naked, Raphael's Muses are chastely clothed to signify the higher world of intellect, And they hold distinct attributes allowing them to claim individual identities tied to different forms of poetry, drama and music. Despite these attempts to include a few women in his ideal library, Raphael inscribed the Muses within the larger patriarchy which prevailed in both Renaissance humanism and official church culture. In contrast to Mantegna's *Parnassus* painted for Isabella d'Este where Venus and the Muses rule compositionally and Apollo is pushed off to the side as a diminutive figure, Raphael's *Parnassus* placed Apollo in the center, framed and haloed by celestial blue. And he arranged the Muses around the god in passively clinging, "feminine" groups, half of whom gaze amorous at the handsome deity in their midst or listen rapturously to his music. In this way the Muses were subordinated to the male figure of Apollo not unlike the sexy back-up singers used by modern pop singers. For all the recognition of their individual identities, their chaste intellect was compromised by a heightened anatomical rhetoric of "feminine" sweetness, beauty, and swooning feeling.

Only one real female thinker or poet was allowed into Raphael's decorations for the pope's library. This was Sappho, featured prominently in the foreground of the Parnassus, holding the instrument she invented and bequeathed, along with her poems, as her legacy to mankind. She also holds the famous letter she supposedly wrote to a lover which ends with a bold proclamation of the greatness of her name.^{vi} The presence of Sappho does little to undermine the all-male world of Raphael's ideal academy and curriculum. Indeed, Sappho's focus on love poetry, not the higher form of epic, confirmed Renaissance gender roles, as did her suicide in despair over a lover's rejection.

While opening the academy door a tiny crack for women, her exceptional presence also proved the largely unstated humanist rule that great intellectual and literary accomplishment was invariably masculine. This assumption would have been particularly appealing in the patriarchal world of papal culture and in the all-male institutions of Catholic governance.

ⁱ Matthias Winner, "Projects and Execution in the Stanza della Segnatura", in Raphael in the Apartments of Julius II and Leo X, Milan: Electa, 1993, pp. 247ff. For more on the frequent humanist flattery of Julius II as a new Julius Caesar, see Stinger.

ⁱⁱ This section draws on John O'Malley's article on Golden Age discourse at the court of Julius II and on Charles Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*.

ⁱⁱⁱ For Lorenzo de' Medici, See Janet Cox-Rearick's classic study, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, Princeton University Press, 1984. The most recent and thorough study of Isabella d'Este's mythologies is Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

^{iv} Papal Golden Age discourse is discussed in Stinger, *op. cit.*, and John O'Malley, "Fulfillment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II: Text of a Discourse by Edigio of Viterbo," 1507," *Traditio*, 25, 1969, 265ff. Also see the section on Golden Age discourse in my essay, "Classical Backgrounds to Renaissance Landscape" on my web site under the page, Book on Landscape.

^v Winner, *op. cit.*, p. 266

^{vi} Of course, Sappho didn't write this letter. Ovid did. But Renaissance humanists were happy to put Ovid's letter from Sappho to Phaon to good use here (Ovid's *Heroides XV*) Sappho's fictitious letter asks Phaon if he recognizes her from her letter before he reaches her name at the end. The letter proudly boasts, "I myself carry the greatness of my name". For this important background, I draw on Winner, who says nothing about the exclusion of women from Raphael's frescoes or the gendering of knowledge in Renaissance humanism. The greatest contemporary authority on gender and Renaissance humanism is Margaret King who has published a number of books on the topic.