

The Protestant Reformation Revolutionized Art

Martin Luther's Reformation ended a period of dominance and unity in Europe under the Roman Catholic Church. This unity lasted for more than 1,000 years. The Protestant reformers influenced artists who became inspired by the new ideas of faith, forgiveness, a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and the powerful stories in the *Holy Bible*.



The Denial of St. Peter (Caravaggio, 1610)

This is one of the last paintings of Caravaggio before he died in 1610 at the age of 38. The last few years of his life were difficult as he was involved in several fights and accused of killing a man. Caravaggio knew how to escape arrest, as does Peter on the night of the arrest of Jesus.

Notice the three fingers emphasizing that St. Peter denied Jesus three times. Peter betrayed his best friend and as a result he no longer has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The events around the arrest of Jesus were confusing and it is only human to be worried about our own safety and life.

The enduring influence of Caravaggio is that we cannot look at his art as an observer. I (perhaps you) see myself as exposed when I am confronted with questions. Unfortunately, at times I disguise my faith by making it appear less powerful than it really is. I (perhaps you) have denied Jesus too many times in my life by remaining silent. Caravaggio makes the viewer think about our faith and times of denial in the way he paints the eyes of his characters - they see nothing!

Even though the servant girl reports that Peter was with Jesus, she cannot look at him. In fact, as she accuses Peter, she appears to have her own doubts. Perhaps this is her moment for coming to faith. I am not sure if the subject of this painting is Peter or the servant girl - your thoughts?

"While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus, she said.

But he denied it. 'I don't know or understand what you're talking about,' he said, and went out into the entryway.

When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, 'This fellow is one of them.' Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, 'surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.'

He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about.'

Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept." (Mark 14:66-72)

The paintings following the Reformation reveal the importance of faith, repentance, and God's presence. Even though Catholics and Protestants disagreed over some teachings, the artists kept Christians united and focused on what really mattered! We live in a world where God helps us to understand the mystery of faith through ordinary people and in some cases his message is revealed to us through people we would least expect!