

Yvonne zu Dohna

**The Aesthetics of Spirituality
The Influence of Ignatius and Luther on
Caravaggio's and Rembrandt's Painting of *St Matthew and the Angel***

This paper aims to show that it is possible to find a coincidence between certain types of religious experience and specific structures of the work of art. Rembrandt and Caravaggio both painted *St Matthew and the Angel* (fig. 1 and 3), but each of them used different important theological-aesthetic visions present during the 16th century: Caravaggio's painting was influenced by the vision of Ignatius, while Rembrandt's central idea can be traced back to mainstream protestant thought, as exemplified by Luther. The immanence of the divine in Caravaggio's figures makes it clear that inspiration can come both from outside, and inside the human being. In the painting, while having a dialogue, Matthew and the angel look in each other's eyes, engaged in a type of colloquium resembling the one described by Ignatius in his spiritual exercises. In the case of Rembrandt instead, the divine is immanent in the colour, in the undefined form, as he clearly shows by indicating that the living voice of God can be heard by the soul of the individual human being. Herein lies the difference in both the aesthetic and the motives of the two artists. Yet, both want to show that the divine is present: present in the physical presence of the body. If we follow this path we will be able to deepen an important ecumenical dialogue, with the help of the great artistic expressions in these works of art.