

**Tamara Quírico**

***Michelangelo's Last Judgement: art and religion between Reformation and Counter-Reformation***

Michelangelo's monumental *Last Judgement*, one of his greatest masterpieces, has also been a controversial work. Criticism came especially from the Roman Curia, later influenced by the most radical Counter-reformists. Many opponents were concerned that Protestants would use the *Last Judgement* painting as weapon against Catholics. Nevertheless, all criticism towards Michelangelo's work and its consequent censorship came fundamentally from Catholics, in a *crescendo* of its condemnation which culminated in the tangible possibility of the fresco's obliteration in 1564. Arguments against Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* must be measured within a broader picture: indeed, since the end of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italy there was among some religious groups a severe condemnation of the so-called *ritorno all'antico*. The Catholic Reformation, therefore, should be considered a reaction against Protestantism inasmuch as it was a response against humanist values spread by Renaissance culture – of which the Sistine fresco would certainly be one of the greatest examples. Regarded as revolutionary, due to all the innovations created by the artist in the Last Judgement theme, the Sistine fresco was also, nonetheless, deeply indebted to Medieval iconographic tradition of the Doomsday. Michelangelo, in fact, could not have conceived his huge fresco without the inspiration taken from the many preceding iconographic models, largely available in Italy. This paper shall analyse Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* fresco in its compositional structure, and particularly in its iconographic aspects. We shall discuss the elements which aroused the criticism of the Roman Curia, and which could have justified the iconoclast impetus of the Roman Curia and the possible destruction of the fresco.