



THE REDEEMER IN GLORY BY CORREGGIO

Placed in Room IX of the Pinacoteca Vaticana, where other masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance such as Leonardo da Vinci's *St. Jerome* and Giovanni Bellini's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* are exhibited, Antonio Allegri's *Redeemer in Glory*, a medium-sized oil on canvas, was originally the *cymatium* of the so-called *Triptych of the Humanity of Christ*, painted by the Emilian master around 1525 for the high altar of the Church of Santa Maria della Misericordia in Correggio. For the same church, about ten years earlier, the artist had painted the *Four Saints* now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

The lost side panels of the triptych, copies of which are preserved at the Royal Collection in Windsor Castle and in a private collection, depicted *Saint John the Baptist* and *Saint Bartholomew*. The complex altarpiece, consisting of the three paintings by Correggio and a rich frame, was designed to contain and protect a 15th century polychrome terracotta sculpture, attributable to Desiderio da Settignano and an object of great popular devotion, depicting the *Madonna of Mercy*.

Iconographically borrowed from Giulio Romano's *Deesis with Saints Paul and Catherine of Alexandria*, painted around 1520 for the Monastery of St. Paul in Parma, the *Redeemer* presents a very high quality in every part of the composition, recalling other works of the artist's near coeval period: if the face of the protagonist recalls the small oil on panel painting of the *Face of Christ* of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the putti show close affinities with those frescoed in the cupola of St. John the Evangelist in Parma.

In the most recent restoration of the work, completed in 2011 by Claudio Rossi de Gasperis at the Vatican Museums' Laboratory for the Restoration of Paintings and Wooden Materials, not only was the brilliant and cold palette typical of Correggio around 1525 completely recovered, but the master's extraordinary ability to create delicate tonal passages and colour nuances, in a manner typical of Leonardo and later Giorgione, has re-emerged in all its disruptive power, contrasting with the maximum white light emanating from the hieratic figure of Christ.

There were many and very turbulent changes of venue for the work before its definitive arrival in the Vatican collections. In 1613, the painting was sold by the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Misericordia to Prince Giovanni Siro da Correggio of Austria, who in 1644 sold it to the French ambassador Francesco Bonsi. The latter, in 1663, sold it to the Flemish painter and antiquarian Nicolas Régnier, who in 1666, a year before his death, obtained permission to sell his collection in an official lottery in Venice: in the lottery catalogue, at number 33, was described "a painting by Correggio's hand

with a nude Saviour seated above the Iris with a beautiful white cloth, with a glory of angels around it”. The painting was won or perhaps purchased by Antonio Barbaro, Venetian ambassador to the Holy See and governor of Corfu, who bequeathed it to Carlo Gritti in 1677, two years before his death.

In 1782, after having been in the hands of the Venetian antiquarian Giovan Maria Sasso for a few years, the work passed to Giovanni Antonio Armano who in turn sold it in 1811 to Count Ferdinando Marescalchi of Bologna, Napoleon’s minister and one of Europe’s greatest collectors. Illegally transferred to Paris in 1826 by Carlo Marescalchi, Ferdinando’s son, the canvas was brought back to Rome in 1827 and purchased in 1829 for 8,000 scudi by the Papal Government, then carefully restored by Vincenzo Camuccini and finally placed in a museum in 1832.

FABRIZIO BIFERALI



CURATOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF XV-XVI CENTURY ART