Breaking Bread:
Piety, Poverty, and Praxis in Tintoretto's Last Suppers

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Abstract

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Jacopo Robusti, known as Tintoretto, completed nine paintings of the Last Supper during his lifetime. These works exhibit a stylistic and iconographic evolution that showcases a deep preoccupation with the impoverished, while versions completed after the Council of Trent also center the Eucharist as their primary subject. Concurrently, careful analysis of Tintoretto's career during and after the 1570s reveals a developing pattern of gift giving and generosity that becomes counterproductive to maintaining a successful business and undermines the traditional view of Tintoretto's business-driven character and artistic persona. These factors, coupled with the stylistic developments found in the post-Tridentine *Last Supper*s, emphasize that Tintoretto's primary motive in his late career was the acquisition of piety through the act of painting.

On September 23rd, 1845, English polymath John Ruskin wrote to his father after visiting the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice: "I have been quite overwhelmed to-day by a man whom I have never dreamed of—Tintoret. I had always thought him a good and clever and forcible painter; but I had not the smallest notion of his enormous power." Like many before him, and even more since, John Ruskin was dazed when confronted with Tintoretto's works in their intended setting. A critical component of Tintoretto's artistic genius is missing without the context of Venice's unique cityscape. The labyrinthian pathways that end abruptly in darkness, tessellated shapes that dance on walls as the water from canals scatters light, and mist from the lagoon that clings to everything and everyone; this was Tintoretto's Venice, and it remains inseparable from his work. A day later Ruskin wrote: "I never was so utterly crushed to the earth before any human intellect as I was today, before Tintoret." After the experience of viewing Tintoretto's works in the Scuola, Ruskin claimed he could only "lie on a bench and laugh."[1] Many since Ruskin have noted the inextricable link between Tintoretto and Venice, a connection that runs deeper than painting. After his life Tintoretto would come to represent more than just his artwork, he became "a metonymy for the 'Venetian' within a larger history of art."[2] Venice's impact on Tintoretto, and Tintoretto's impact on Venice, reveals the complicated overlap between faith, government, and labor that defined Cinquecento Venice.

The Venice of the sixteenth century is a wholly distinct entity from the sinking city seen today. In a city where "patriotism equaled piety" it is no surprise that the religiosity of its inhabitants was so continuously broadcast.[3] Historian Edward Muir notes that contemporary Venetian scholars believed that the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity were the

[1] The letters of September 23rd and 24th can be found in full in E.T. Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin* (London: G. Allen, 1911), 187.
[2] Maria H. Loh, "Death, History, and the Marvelous Lives of Tintoretto," *Art History* 31, no. 5 (2008): 679.
[3] Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 16.

foundation of the ideologies of the Venetian Republic.[4] In Venice, one's *Venezianità*, or "Venetian-ness", hinged upon adherence to the philosophies of the government, which in turn were based upon theology. The "Myth of Venice" comprises not only the city's foundational mythos, but also the search for the source of Venice's purported political harmony and civil stability. More than simply a series of tales detailing Venice's rise from a humble Roman fishing village, the "Myth of Venice" can be seen as a deliberate campaign of historical revisionism. Through an eclectic mix of Catholic dogma, self-aggrandizing myth, and many state-sponsored artistic commissions, Venice was able to redefine itself as a city particularly blessed by God. The various political crises on the Italian Peninsula (and the lack thereof in Venice) during the fifteenth century and sixteenth century aided in legitimizing Venice's identity as "*La Serenessima*", or the "Most Serene Republic of Venice." Of course, as with all foundation myths, the truth is much more complicated and far less elegant. With regard to Tintoretto, his contributions to the construction of the Myth of Venice are more important than its believability. The constant flow of commissions that moved through Tintoretto's workshop afforded him a unique opportunity to alter the shape of Venice's self-image, as he was continually shaping his own.

Venice's unique reputation as *La Serenissima* was well known throughout Europe, and more importantly, was believed by Venetians and non-Venetians alike. In his chapter on the Myth of Venice, Muir underscores how a range of notable humanists, poets, popes, emperors and scholars concurred that Venice should be praised for the beauty and virtue of its city and citizenry. Muir contends that the Neoplatonic belief that "outward beauty" showcased "inward virtue" was evident in the cityscape of Venice.[5] The serene and elegant architecture, integrating

[4] Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 16.
[5] Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 15.

seamlessly with water, was a representation of social harmony and abundant faith. The ingenuity of Venice's construction resulted in a city that seemed to float on water, unburdened by the constraints of the natural world. Sparkling tides and clear blue waters astonished visitors and lent credence to the feeling that Venice was God's chosen city "infused with his grace."[6] Plagues, famine, and exceedingly rare political turmoil were the only threats to the sanctity of the city itself.

The location of Venice allowed the city to act as trade hub and gateway to Europe, and their willingness to construct lucrative trade deals with peoples that were deemed undesirable by other European powers resulted in a staggeringly successful mercantile empire. The chief among these undesirables were the Ottoman Turks, with whom the Venetians fought a series of wars every few decades from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth century, which would inevitably result in a lucrative trade deal, regardless of which side won the current war. Centuries of mercantile prosperity led to a flourishing of state-sponsored art which reached a peak in the Cinquecento. Government officials, nobles, rich merchants, well-to-do religious officials, and a plethora of scuole, the distinctive confraternities for which Venice was noted, commissioned a massive number of public and private works over the sixteenth century. The republican ideology of Venice meant that no single painter could become a state favorite, therefore large commissions were often broken down into smaller projects for many different artists.[7] Workshops flourished throughout the city as artists vied for commissions in an increasingly competitive market. Despite the plethora of painters throughout the city, three stood out as the most successful: Titian, Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese.

[6] Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 16.
[7] Frederick Ilchman, "Venetian Painting in the Age of Rivals," in *Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston: MFA Publications, 2009), 29.

Perceptions

These three men would shape the artistic trends in Venice during their lifetimes and beyond. Of the three, Jacopo Robusti, known as Tintoretto, was the only major painter in Cinquecento Venice to have been born in the city. As the most prominent Venetian-born artist of the Cinquecento, Tintoretto rightfully occupies a unique place within its history. While many scholars have noted Tintoretto's special connection to Venice, a connection that seems to go beyond a simple place of inhabitance, there has been resistance to this idea. Notably, Tom Nichols' analysis of Tintoretto's place, or lack thereof, within the circles of the contemporary Venetian artistic elite has become entrenched in the notion that Tintoretto was an outsider within his own city.[8] In an effort to halt the romanticization of Tintoretto as a sort of 'proletariat painter', the pendulum seems to have swung too far in the opposite direction. There is an undue emphasis placed upon Tintoretto's exclusion from the artistic fore at the hands of Titian and various elite members of the Scuole Grandi. Indeed, Titian did seek to stifle the rise of Tintoretto's career; however, even early in his career Tintoretto received commissions from some of the most prominent figures and organizations within the city. While a few specific examples do not counter the claims of exclusion, they do serve to highlight that Titian's influence had its limits. Or, perhaps more interestingly, that Tintoretto's tenacity and aggressive business tactics proved too successful for the meddling parties. Arguably the fact that Titian and other cultural elites continued to interfere in Tintoretto's career is far more notable than the actual outcome of their schemes.

[8] While I disagree with Tom Nichols on this issue, it must be noted that this paper is deeply indebted to his groundbreaking work on Tintoretto, and Venice in general. The arguments being made here would not be possible without his consistently excellent scholarship.

In Nichols' most recent scholarship on Tintoretto he states that "Tintoretto's technique itself served to assert his cultural difference from the international and courtly Titian."[9] Does this not make Tintoretto the quintessential Venetian? A rejection of Titian's persona, an "international and courtly" painter, only serves to strengthen Tintoretto's ties with the Venetian ideal. While the early stylistic development of Tintoretto is certainly indebted to non-Venetians, Michelangelo specifically, all other aspects of his career are wholly Venetian. Nichols' 2018 article "Coming of Age: Jacopo Tintoretto" resists various new directions the scholarship on Tintoretto is taking. Particularly worried that Tintoretto may be "losing something of his original bite," Nichols proclaims that the absorption of Tintoretto into the category of "Old Master" smooths and flattens the narrative of the rebellious outsider.[10] In effect, the inverse is true. The examination of Tintoretto as an "Old Master" situates him as a central force in the construction of Venetian visual culture during his lifetime and uncovers more than it occludes, primarily because of the previously static interpretations of his character and career. Too often the scholarship pertaining to the artistic development of Tintoretto enforces the notion that his evolution only occurred on canvas. Why can his persona not develop in step with his profession? Is it difficult to believe that the outsider became the insider? Perhaps the trajectory of Venetian visual culture was steered true by a local, unhappy with undue 'foreign' interference.

The mercantile spirit of Venetian innovation is embodied through Tintoretto's career, perhaps best emphasized by his economic strategy: if there is no commission available, invent one. The individualism that Tom Nichols rightly notes in Tintoretto's works is seemingly at odds with conservative Venetian values; however, Tintoretto's individualism was *in service of*

[9] Tom Nichols, "Tintoretto's Self-Portraiture: Shaping a 'Furious' Artistic Identity in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Identity, Practice, Meaning*, ed. Marie-Louise Lillywhite, Tom Nichols, Giorgio Tagliaferro (Rome: Viella, 2022), 67.
[10] Tom Nichols, "Coming of Age: Jacopo Tintoretto," *Burlington Magazine* 160, no. 1389 (December 2018): 1029.

promoting Venetian values, rather than in spite of them. The claim that Tintoretto had a propensity to "upset expectations by promoting the visual and semantic role of marginal accessory figures at the expense of the usual heroic historical actors," misses that his rebelliousness took the form of radical works that foregrounded contemporary social commentary and Catholic values.[11] His break from the Titian-esque tradition served to highlight the collective Venetian experience, rather than hide it. The emphasis on the impoverished everyman, a theme that became a mainstay in Tintoretto's late works, ground his paintings in ideas of egalitarianism and equity which were central tenets of Venice.[12] These facets of Tintoretto's artistic persona became particularly salient in the later 1570s and 1580s. While it is true that Tintoretto did begin as an outsider within the circles of the Venetian cultural elites, he was never an outsider to Venice itself, and painting his work with the broad brush of "individualism" betrays one of the most important aspects of his development as an artist and a person: defiance in the service of popular piety.

Throughout Tintoretto's career there is a concerted effort to maintain a humble image of a Venetian citizen trying to support his large family through his honest profession. An examination of the iconography of Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s reveals a deep preoccupation with the fate of the impoverished, while his post-1570 iterations of the theme come to lay new emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist and the importance of almsgiving to spiritual and physical wellbeing. Meanwhile, his practice of gifting paintings, or executing them for the material cost, highlights a pattern of generosity that went beyond the bounds of simple market manipulation. A large, carefully organized workshop allowed Tintoretto to personally focus on

[11] Nichols, "Coming of Age," 1029.
[12] Within its contemporary context, such terms refer to the idea of an equal citizenry. As was the case, and still is in many places, those who were not citizens or independently wealthy were not afforded the same concern.

commissions that strongly engaged with his faith. His business strategy, that was implemented to secure a large share of the Venetian art market, continued to be utilized much later than was necessary or financially beneficial. The complex interactions between business, faith, and charity allowed for Tintoretto to actualize the teachings present in his works. The continued support of the *popolani* served as a form of Christian theological praxis; in effect, Tintoretto gained piety through painting.

Persona

Titian, thirty years Tintoretto's senior and forty in the case of Veronese, lived long enough that his career overlapped with the other two artists for over twenty-five years. Titian positioned himself as the kingmaker in the Venetian art market, and even though there could be no officially-favored state painter due to the republican nature of Venice, he was the *de facto* state painter for decades, starting in the 1520s. *La senseria* was an annual stipend that paid an artist 100 ducats per year for various works in association with the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the warehouse of the German merchants in Venice. Although there were up to thirty of these sinecures given out, usually for life, Titian transformed the role of the *senseria*, which he received in 1523, to act as the designator of the "official painter of the republic."[13] In this role Titian would frequently support or interfere with commissions for artists that he deemed acceptable or troublesome. Most often this support was for Paolo Veronese, whom scholars see as the heir to Titian's legacy of the aristocratic courtly painter. Conversely, the painter that would most frequently provoke Titian's ire was Tintoretto.

[13] Paul Joannides, *Titian to 1518: The Assumption of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 164.

Little is known about Tintoretto's youth; most importantly his master (if he had one) is unknown. Carlo Ridolfi, Tintoretto's first and most important early biographer, states that a young Jacopo was apprenticed to Titian, who then kicked him out of his workshop due to jealousy over the boy's talent. While it may be true that Tintoretto did spend some amount of time in Titian's workshop, it is almost certainly apocryphal that he was removed due to a "worm of jealousy" in Titian's heart.[14] There is evidence to suggest he spent time in the workshop of Bonifazio de' Pitati; however, his role within this workshop is unknown. Tintoretto did not shy away from claiming he was an autodidact, which was subsequently repeated by Ridolfi, and a slightly later biographer, Marco Boschini.[15] It is likely that Tintoretto did not want to attach his name to any one master, especially if they were of little renown. Titian is known to have been trained by Giovanni Bellini, and as such had a pedigree that he could advertise in his early years. Giovanni Bellini's workshop was perhaps the largest in Italy during his lifetime which set a precedent for high artistic output in the decades following his death in 1516.[16] Furthermore, Giovanni Bellini's adoption and mastery of oil painting, as well as the canvas support, revolutionized Venetian painting.[17] If Tintoretto was ejected from Titian's workshop, and forced to work with an artist with less clout, it is no surprise that he claimed to be self-taught.

Tintoretto's early career and upbringing is of interest for the lasting impact it would have on his later career and patronage, in a way that was unlike Titian or Veronese. While it is true that Titian and Veronese came from humble beginnings, they both shed their working-class roots

[14] Carlo Ridolfi, "Life of Tintoretto," in *Lives of Tintoretto*, ed. Carlo Cosato (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2019), 76.
[15] Stefania Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 48.
[16] Ilchman, *Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, 92.
[17] Bellini's experimentation was aided by Antonello da Messina, a Sicilian to whom Giorgio Vasari attributed the introduction of oil paints to Italy. Although unlikely to have introduced them to Italy, da Messina did encourage Bellini's adoption of the medium in 1475; Ilchman, "Venetian Painting," 29.

as soon as possible. For Titian, this meant fully embracing the knighthood he received from Emperor Charles V in 1533, achieving the rank of Count Palatine and Knight of the Golden Spur. In the case of Veronese, he adopted the persona of the courtly painter that had been successfully implemented by Titian. Born Paolo Spezapreda, meaning "stonecutter", he quickly changed his name to Paolo Caliari upon his arrival in Venice to avoid associations with the working class (*popolani*).[18] Although he went by Veronese, denoting his birthplace of Verona, the change of his name is a clear indication of higher-class aspirations. Conversely, the continued association Tintoretto had, and took great care to maintain, with the Venetian *popolani* throughout the whole of his career is noteworthy.[19] Prior to 1550 the nicknames bestowed on artists in Venice were geographically or ethnically based.[20] There are exceptions, such as Giorgione (tall George); however, it seems that nicknames served to "differentiate rather than *individualize*."[21] As such, Tintoretto's insistence on using a name associated with dyeworks aligns with the individualist streak noted by Nichols. Tintoretto's individualism fueled associations with a specific group of artisans and laborers, a fact that is integral to his artistic persona.

To understand Tintoretto's associations with the *popolani*, it is crucial to know the background of his family and his early associates. Jacopo Robusti was born in Venice in 1518/1519 to the dyer (*tintore*) Giovanni Battista Robusti, a Brescian who moved to Venice before Jacopo's birth. Although claimed to be of "aristocratic heritage" by a fabled document,

[18] Tom Nichols, "Tintoretto's Poverty," in *New Interpretations of Venetian Renaissance Painting*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (London: Birkbeck College, 1994), 99.
[19] Varying sources use the term *popolani* and *popolari* interchangeably. Both denote commoners.
[20] Schiavone, Veronese (Paolo or Bonifacio), Bassano, Pordenone, even Titian was called da Cadore during his life. Philip Cottrell, "Thence comes it that my name receives a brand: Tintoretto's Nickname Reconsidered," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Identity, Practice, Meaning*, ed. Marie-Louise Lillywhite, Tom Nichols, Giorgio Tagliaferro (Rome: Viella, 2022), 39.
[21] Cottrell, "Tintoretto's Nickname Reconsidered," 39.

"*Genealogia de la casa de Tintoretto*" that was summarized in a letter nearly a century after Tintoretto's death, it is highly unlikely that the Robusti lineage had the prestige purported in the document.[22] Battista ran a dye workshop in the San Cassiano neighborhood, a subdivision of the San Polo district (*sestieri*). The first document to appear with Tintoretto's name is a tax document for a rented property also in San Cassiano, from January 29th, 1538, signed by "Mister Jacomo the painter."[23] What little we do know about Tintoretto's father is important to the identity Tintoretto would later construct for himself. From the documentation it can be assumed that the two men lived in the same neighborhood, and that Battista was an active member of the silk guild (*Arte della Seta*). In 1538, 1540, and 1549, he was elected *sazadore* by his fellow guildsmen, meaning that he was an expert in silk pigmentation and dye quality.[24] Battista taking an active role in his *arte* no doubt had a lasting effect on Tintoretto, something shown in his numerous commissions and continued support for various *arti* later in his career.

The watershed moment in Tintoretto's career came in 1548, with *The Miracle of the Slave* (fig. 1), a commission for the Scuola Grande di San Marco. The scuole were lay confraternities that were "uniquely Venetian" due to their sworn allegiance to the Doge, Venice's elected ruler, and their charitable deeds. Throughout the sixteenth century the Scuole Grandi were some of the most important patrons in Venice, due to their ample wealth that was frequently spent on decoration. The massive narrative painting depicts Saint Mark, the patron

[22] The *Genealogia* has been lost, but a summary survives in the form of a letter from Antonio Saurer to his employer, the Spanish Marquis del Carpio, who purchased the "remains" of the Tintoretto family workshop in 1682. Within this summary it is stated that Battista Robusti had a brother, Antonio Comin, with whom he "robustly" defended the walls of Padua during a siege in 1509, thus earning his sobriquet. Antonio Comin is known to have been Tintoretto's uncle, as Tintoretto was the beneficiary of Antonio's will in 1578. Further claims within this summary, such as Tintoretto having twenty-two siblings, are almost certainly false; Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 39; Miguel Falomir, "Tintoretto and Spain: From El Greco to Velázquez," in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 164.
[23] Dated 1537, Venetian style; Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 39.
[24] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 40.

saint of Venice, intervening to save an escaped slave from his captors. The painting features numerous quotations from Michelangelo, Lorenzo Lotto, Jacopo Bassano, architecture by Jacopo Sansovino, ancient sculpture, and most daringly, Titian.[25] Not only did Tintoretto quote Titian, but he chose to emulate a figure from the old master's 1518 masterpiece *The Assumption of the Virgin*, which was Titian's breakout work. The inclusion of this figure, placed so prominently in his first public masterwork, could only be read as a challenge to Titian. The resulting publicity seemed to erupt overnight, especially because of the rejection of the painting by the Scuola Grande di San Marco, which eventually opted to send the piece back to Tintoretto's workshop. While Titian surely would have liked to control the public narrative surrounding the work, Tintoretto unveiled his first masterpiece while Titian was away in Augsburg.[26] Although rejected by the Scuola, the work was publicly praised by many. Most notably, Pietro Aretino, an author and literary critic, published a letter to Tintoretto in April of 1548 in which he lauded the artist for the work seeming "rather real than simulated."[27] The response to the *The Miracle of the Slave* set the trend for Tintoretto's works to be received with varying degrees of praise and admonishment from other artists, writers, critics, and patrons. For better and worse, the young painter was launched to the forefront of the Venetian art scene after nearly a decade as a struggling painter. The reception to *The Miracle of the Slave* foregrounds Tintoretto's associations with writers that significantly boosted his notoriety in the 1550s.

The relationships Tintoretto had with literary figures such as Andrea Calmo, Anton Francesco Doni, and Pietro Aretino has become a critical part of characterizing his early career.

[25] Roland Krischel, "Tintoretto at Work," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 65.
[26] Ilchman, *Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, 113.
[27] Pietro Aretino, "April, 1548," in *Lives of Tintoretto*, ed. Carlo Cosato (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2019), 55-58.

1548 is also the year that Tintoretto received his nickname, first documented in a letter from Calmo.[28] Tintoretto and Calmo collaborated on stage sets and prop design, and Calmo would frequently write to or about Tintoretto in various letters.[29] While Pietro Aretino was more closely associated with the 'Titian Faction' of the Venetian art world, he praised Tintoretto in two letters (1545, 1548) for his realism; however, Aretino was critical of Tintoretto's speed of execution (*prestezza*). Titian's sojourn to Augsburg is likely the reason that Aretino felt he could publish his praises for *The Miracle of the Slave*. Aretino, ever crafty, commended himself for his judgment in noticing Tintoretto's talent, while the criticism of the artist's *prestezza* left Aretino with an out should he ever need to get back into Titian's good graces. After Aretino's letters, the condemnation of young Jacopo's *prestezza* has become the dominant trend of the critical analysis of his works.[30] Aretino saw Tintoretto's speed as a product of carelessness; Calmo and Doni felt differently and praised the *prestezza* evident in his works. In a letter from Calmo addressed to "Messer Giacomo Tintoretto the Painter, the Favourite of Nature, Commixture of Æsculapius and Stepson of Apelles", the playwright admires Tintoretto's ability to paint a figure from nature in "half an hour."[31] In similar fashion, Doni praised Tintoretto in the dedication of his 1553 edition of Burchiello's *Rime*, a book of comical and burlesque poetry, fitting for men of their artisan background.[32] Beyond increasing the young painter's renown, these figures had a

[28] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 39.
[29] Roland Krischel, "Tintoretto and the Sister Arts," in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 125.
[30] Pietro Aretino would frequently publish his correspondence with artists and literary figures. These publications were wildly popular and drew widespread acclaim. The notoriety of Aretino's writing made him the defining figure of Venetian visual culture until his death in 1556. Tintoretto does not appear in Aretino's writing after 1549, most likely due to the latter's close relationship with Titian; Ilchman, *Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, 114; Tom Nichols, "Tintoretto family," Grove Art Dictionary, https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T085169. The entry pertaining to Tintoretto serves as a succinct timeline of the major events and commissions of his life.
[31] Andrea Calmo, "Further delightful and ingenious letters," in *Lives of Tintoretto*, ed. Carlo Cosato (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2019), 61.
[32] Anna Laura Lepschy, *Tintoretto observed: A documentary survey of critical reactions from the 16th to the 20th century* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1983), 19.

significant influence on the painting technique and business strategy of Tintoretto during his most decisive decade, the 1550s.

Aretino, Doni, and Calmo were members of a loose association of writers, editors, publishers, and playwrights known as the *poligrafi*. The *poligrafi* were of a similar background to Tintoretto, mostly sons of artisans and craftsmen. Doni's father was a scissor maker and Calmo was also the son of a dyer like Tintoretto and was one of his closest friends. Doni was the secretary of the Accademia Pellegrini, a literary society whose members included Tintoretto, Titian, author Lodovico Dolce, publisher Francesco Marcolini, and architect Jacopo Sansovino. Although a distinct entity from the *poligrafi*, the Accademia Pellegrini would have allowed Tintoretto to rub shoulders with the Venetian cultural elite and more readily understand them. Tintoretto certainly preferred the *poligrafi*, possibly because of their low-class background and how they used this notion to shape their public image.[33] By purposefully linking themselves with *mediocratis*, the antithesis of the courtly and erudite culture (*magnificentia*) taking hold in Europe, the *poligrafi* evoked the enduring myth of the fishing village that was governed by "humble equality" and would later grow into the city of Venice.[34] Tintoretto's public persona as the "little dyer" would have greatly resonated with the *poligrafi* and their self-defined image.

The Venetian textile industry flourished in the sixteenth century, resulting in a plethora of dyers, silk cutters, wool traders, and associated other professions. Tintoretto's identification with the textile industry is emblematic of both his popular piety and approach to business. The membership of the Scuola Grande di San Marco and the Scuola Grande di San Rocco both included many men within the textile industry as well. Brian Pullan's analysis of the makeup of

[33] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 44-45.
[34] Tom Nichols, *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity* (London: Reaktion Books), 101, 139.

these two Scuole Grandi found that a plurality of the entrants were textile and clothing laborers.[35] For San Marco, 12.6% of the entrants between 1550-1590 were reported to be in the textile trade; for San Rocco between c.1490-c.1540 that number jumps to 25%. In the case of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco the next highest recorded profession is men working with "victuals and wine", coming in at only 7.5%.[36] For Tintoretto, the "little dyer", this meant that his potential patrons within these Scuole Grandi would be men like his father, allowing him to appeal to a "vital customer base."[37] Furthermore, Philip Cottrell notes in his recent writing on Tintoretto's nickname, that within Venice the definition of a 'painter' was much more broad than our current usage of the word. Cottrell states that a treatise on dyeing published by Giovanventura Rosetti in 1548, the same year Tintoretto debuted *The Miracle of the Slave,* includes methods and materials "such as those used by painters" in the section devoted to the dyeing of leather.[38] The Venetian painter's guild (*Arte dei Depentori*) included men like Titian and Bonifacio di Pitati, but also included "frame and shield painters, gilders," and "virtually anyone who wielded a brush professionally."[39] Furniture painters, like Tintoretto in his early career, would have also been included within such a group. Tintoretto's identification with the dyers further supports the idea that his nickname served as more than a form of rebellious individualism and was actually carefully crafted to invoke, and attract clientele from, the storied systems of the *Scuole* and *arti*.

Patronage

[35] Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 96.
[36] Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 96.
[37] Cottrell, "Tintoretto's Nickname Reconsidered," 16.
[38] Cottrell, "Tintoretto's Nickname Reconsidered," 18.
[39] Cottrell, "Tintoretto's Nickname Reconsidered," 18

The patrons most frequently linked to Tintoretto's mid-career and late works are the numerous scuole that proliferated in Venice. Approximately 200 scuole were active in Venice during the sixteenth century; five were *Scuole Grandi* with a sixth being approved in 1552.[40] Besides the Venetian Republic itself, the Scuole Grandi were the most important patrons of art during the Cinquecento. The membership of the Scuole Grandi ranged from 500–600 official members and, in order to align with Venetian values, drew from all sociopolitical classes which offered the *popolani* a way to impact their communities outside of political offices.[41] The 1563 census puts the membership of the six Scuole Grandi at roughly 5,500 members, or 10% of the Venetian adult male population.[42] A mix of rich and poor members was mutually beneficial for the brothers of the Scuole Grandi because the rich would aid the poor with "material benefits such as hospices, dowries, and housing" while the poor "prayed for the souls of the rich and marched in their funeral processions."[43] The Scuole Grandi essentially aided in the transfer of excess wealth, "which enabled the rich to perform specific services to the poor."[44] Over time this transformed the Scuole Grandi from "a primarily religious into a religious and philanthropic institution," by standardizing charitable systems to aid the less fortunate members of the Scuole.[45] The remaining scuole were *Scuole Piccole,* which had fewer members, sometimes a dozen or less. These scuole differed from their larger counterparts in ways other than their size, such as allowing women to become members, having a more focused charity program, and

[40] Patricia Fortini Brown, "Where the Money Flows: Art Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston: MFA Publications, 2009), 46.
[41] As Brian Pullan notes in his analysis of the Scuole, the membership frequently exceeded the intended range of 500-600 members. Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 86-88.
[42] Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 94.
[43] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 47.
[44] Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 72.
[45] Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 72.

frequently having a more homogeneous membership.[46] Many Scuole Piccole were organized around specific nationalities or trades, and as such they frequently operated as the religious arm of trade guilds.

A unique phenomenon in the second half of the sixteenth century was the rapid spread of *Scuole del Sacramento*. Unlike the other Scuole, both Grandi and Piccole, the Scuole del Sacramento were not organized around a specific saint, nationality, or trade, but a religious rite: the Eucharist. The emphasis put on sacraments, and specifically the Eucharist, by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) instigated the amplified emphasis placed on the practice of consecration and the doctrines of Transubstantiation and the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated host. Venice's first Scuola del Sacramento was founded in the church of Corpus Domini in 1395.[47] By 1500 they began to proliferate slowly throughout the parishes; San Giuliano in 1502, San Cassiano in 1504 (where Tintoretto was renting a house in 1538), San Moisé in 1506, San Marziale in 1512 (where Tintoretto lived the majority of his life).[48] The Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther's challenge to the Real Presence increased the support for the Scuole del Sacramento. Eventually, a Papal Bull in 1539 by Pope Paul III gave the Scuole del Sacramento papal support.[49] These scuole spread swiftly during the Counter Reformation and were present in nearly every parish in Venice by the eighteenth century. Each Scuola del Sacramento would be responsible for the proper veneration of the Eucharist within the churches in their parish. Offices

[46] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 47.
[47] Paul Hills, "Piety and Patronage in Cinquecento Venice: Tintoretto and the Scuole del Sacramento," *Art History* 6, no. 1 (March 1983): 40.
[48] In addition to those listed, Hills documents the following: 1506, Sant'Apollinare and Santa Maria del Giglio; 1507, San Bartolomeo and Santa Sofia; 1510, San Stae; 1511, San Toma and SS. Apostoh; 1513, San Pantaleone; 1516, San Silvestro; 1529, San Martino; 1531, San Giovanni Grisostomo; 1538, San Niccolo da Tolentino; 1539, San Canciano. Piety and Patronage in Cinquecento Venice. Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 32, 40.
[49] Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 33.

within these scuole would only be held for a year, allowing a large number of the members to participate in administration and governance.

While the Myth of Venice professed republican ideals through equality, most government positions were reserved for the patricians (*patrizi*). Term lengths were usually brief and offices did rotate frequently in the spirit of republicanism and egalitarianism, except for the Doge, who was elected for life. These rotations would often work through a small group of *patrizi* who would rotate from office to office amongst themselves. Scuole del Sacramento offices were open to all members, and were likely a better embodiment of Venetian egalitarianism than any other organization in Venice. Scuole charters (*mariegole*) dictated the purpose and function of the scuole, which in turn had to be approved by the Council of Ten.[50] The Council of Ten functioned separately from the standard governmental bodies, and was primarily focused with state security and ensuring other government entities ran smoothly.[51] That the *mariegole* required the approval of the Council of Ten is telling of their purpose within Venetian society. Rather than being subservient to church authorities, the scuole were under the purview of the state, and more specifically the entity responsible for state security. Clergy specifically were excluded from the administration of the scuole in an effort to curb possible influence from the Pope or other non-Venetian church officials.[52] Clerical control of the scuole would have excluded the organizations from Venetian taxation, closing off a major stream of funding to the state.

The Council of Ten standardized the *mariegole* of the scuole and after the Poor Law of 1529 encouraged almsgiving to the poor within the scuole's parishes.[53] While concerned with Catholic doctrine, the Scuole del Sacramento were, by definition, lay organizations, and as such

[50] Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 33.
[51] Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 20.
[52] Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 45.
[53] Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 33.

the government could dictate their actions should they find it necessary. Over the sixteenth century, the role of the Scuole (Grandi, Piccole, and del Sacramento) would become more closely tied with state regulated charity than was likely originally intended. Also found within the *mariegole* is a clause espousing the equality of all members and encouraging them to "live in peace and fraternal love."[54] With such a specific focus and uniformity, the Scuole del Sacramento became a staple in Tintoretto's patronage, akin to some of the Scuole Grandi, such as San Rocco or San Marco. The scuole serve as the backbone of Tintoretto's career, and as such the iconography found with his Scuole Grandi and Scuole del Sacramento works offer insights into more than just his artistic style. The development of Tintoretto's own piety and business strategy is tied to the evolution of his iconography for the scuole, with the *Last Supper*s serving as an excellent timeline of this transformation.

Poverty

The subject that Tintoretto painted the most in his career was the Last Supper, which he painted nine times over the course of 47 years. Nearly all of the *Last Supper*s were commissioned by various Scuole del Sacramento and by the latter part of his career Tintoretto was the "painter of choice" for the Scuole del Sacramento, as well as many Scuole Piccole and *arti*.[55] These various *Last Supper*s can generally be broken down into two groups: those focusing on the Annunciation of the Betrayal, and those focusing on the Eucharist. Nearly all of the post-Tridentine treatments feature an emphasis on the Eucharist that neatly aligns with the aims of the Scuole del Sacramento. Beyond serving to enhance the aesthetic value of their location, these works served as a focal point for communicants as they performed the sacrament. Many of

[54] Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 33.
[55] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 47.

Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s were *laterali*, paintings designed for the side walls of an altar chapel. The depiction of Christ and the apostles engaging in the same actions as the communicants elevates the importance of the Eucharist and serves as a reminder of the centrality of religious rites to the Catholic faith. Tintoretto's earliest *Last Supper* (1547) (fig. 2) was painted for a Scuola del Sacramento chapel in the church of San Marcuola and is reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (c.1495–1498) (fig. 3) in Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. The iconography of the work is quite standard, especially when compared to Tintoretto's later iterations. Following the precedent at the time, the scene is parallel to the picture plane. The Annunciation of the Betrayal is shown, and as the apostles deliberate this revelation amongst themselves, Judas is shown in the foreground clutching his bag of coins. Faith enters the scene from the left, carrying a chalice of wine, and her foot steps off of the tile floor and threatens to enter the space of the viewer. Charity, here shown as a server on the right, will become a common motif in many of Jacopo's future iterations of the Last Supper.

The inclusion of Charity as a core component in this scene underscores the importance it had to Tintoretto's faith.[56] Furthermore, as if foreshadowing the eventual shift in subject matter that will begin starting with the 1574/1575 *Last Supper*, Charity and Faith bring bread and wine to the table. While the Eucharist is not being actively shown, these two figures foretell the events to come and take an active role within the narrative of the work. Charity and Faith holding the bread and wine link the physical need for sustenance to the spiritual need for the Catholic virtues. Thomas Worthen proposed that Faith, or the love of God (*amor dei*), is to Christ's right, and Charity, or the love of one's neighbor (*amor proximi*), is on Christ's left.[57] These figures

[56] Jutta Sperling, "Allegories of Charity and the Practice of Poor Relief at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 70 (2009): 119.
[57] Thomas Worthen, "Tintoretto's Paintings for the Banco del Sacramento in S. Margherita," *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 4 (December 1996): 718.

align with the two main roles of the Scuole del Sacramento, proper reverence of the Eucharist and almsgiving. Tintoretto will reuse this conceptual framework in the San Simeone Grande *Last Supper* some years later. The apostles are "de-individualized" to emphasize the communal "social and spiritual characteristics" of the men, focusing the importance on their social status rather than their identity.[58] The relatively humble setting of the meal is perhaps the defining component of Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s, and will continue to be the case in every version he produced.

The subsequent *Last Supper* (1559) (fig. 4) was originally painted for San Felice and is stylistically similar to the 1547 iteration. The table again lies parallel to the picture plane, although it now recedes much deeper in space. Here the apostles are much more animated in their reactions to Christ's announcement of his imminent betrayal. While the previous version is set within a well-lit and artfully tiled room, the setting of this version is indeterminant and murky. The inclusion of a dog in the foreground is also reminiscent of the San Marcuola composition. Tintoretto included dogs in nearly all of his *Last Supper*s, perhaps as a symbol for the loyalty of the apostles. Unlike the prior version, the apostles here have unique personalities and facial features, rendering them distinct from the two figures that crowd into the scene from the left and right. These two figures themselves are unique in that they are portraits of the primary patrons from within this Scuola del Sacramento.

Breaking from established convention, the *Last Supper* (1563/1564) (fig. 5) for San Trovaso is one of the most distinctive paintings ever produced by Tintoretto. Similar to the previous compositions, this work depicts the Annunciation of the Betrayal. The explosive energy of the apostles radiates outward, as some recoil back in shock. The apostle closest to the stairs

[58] Nichols, "Tintoretto family."

throws up his hands in protest and cocks his head back in disbelief. The instability of the picture is aided by the radical two-point perspective that emphasizes the tilting and toppling figures of the apostles. Each man reacts to Christ's announcement in a different way, breaking the credence and visual harmony found in the figural movements of the San Marcuola iteration. The cacophony of the scene is best portrayed through the hands of the apostles, fingers outstretched as they exclaim surprise and disbelief through the physicality of their form. In the center lies the most curious figure, the man reaching for the flask of wine. Having fallen from his seat some time ago, his reach threatens to enter our space and serves as the entry point for the viewer. Piles of clothing drape over the handrails of the stairs and a small stool, giving the area the feel of a disheveled basement. Judas is seated at the far right, with his hand in a bowl, echoing Matthew 26:23: "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me." The architecture of the scene is nearly incoherent, with the layout of the room being the most puzzling aspect.

The stairway on the left is blocked by a maid, watching the events unfold as a silent spectator that grounds the scene in the reality of the viewer's world. Behind Christ is a small staircase that seems to block the exit from the dining area. An antique loggia stretches out into the distance with a group of Charity figures standing idly.[59] The arch of the loggia frames Christ like a makeshift mandorla, showcasing his divinity through the heavenly scene flanking him. On the far left a young boy brings more bread to the apostles; he and the maid are shown here as stand-ins for the notable Charity and Faith figures found in the San Marcuola *Last Supper*. The boy and maid highlight the recipients of the scuole's charitable efforts; almsgiving specifically was written into the *mariegole* of the scuole. Although each Scuola del Sacramento was a

[59] Sperling, "Allegories," 124.

distinct entity, the standardization of their *mariegole* by the Council of Ten made the function and purpose of all Scuole del Sacremento nearly identical.[60] The inclusion of simple furniture such as the rush bottom chairs and flimsy table ground the work in the real world. Remove the halos from these figures and this is no longer a painting of the Last Supper, but a genre scene of some tired, rowdy, and hungry fishmongers, stevedores, and shipwrights. Through a synthesis of religious and genre scenes Tintoretto not only grounds the work in reality, but allows average Venetians to assume the role of the apostles. The familiarization of the setting will become a staple in many of Tintoretto's later iterations of the Last Supper, as he will continue to focus on the quotidian and human aspects of the apostles and their meal.

San Simeone Profeta's *Last Supper* (after 1568) (fig. 6) may be the least studied of Tintoretto's nine versions of the subject. Stylistically similar to the San Trovaso iteration that preceded it, the table is askew and lies at an oblique angle to the picture plane. Charity returns after being absent from the two previous works, again pictured with a jug of wine. A poorly dressed figure evocative of the maid in San Trovaso peeks in from a dimly lit hallway. The apostles remain humbly clothed and rough, Tintoretto now having committed to the iconographic trademark of "promoting the visual and semantic role of marginal accessory figures at the expense of the usual heroic historical actors."[61] The chandelier indicates a slightly more extravagant setting than a dirty basement but the meal and table continue to be mundane in nature. Another curious feature of the work is Christ's position, which is notably *not* in the center of the canvas. An analysis of the painting's original location reveals that Christ's position allows him to be seen from the nave of the church. Had he been centered he would have been blocked

[60] Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 32.
[61] Nichols, "Coming of Age," 1029.

from the view of the congregation by an interior colonnade.[62] Rather than simply adapting to the architecture of the painting's location, the position of Christ would become a key aspect in later *Last Supper* compositions, due to the way Tintoretto used it to convey spiritual and moral meanings that are otherwise missing from his contemporaries' renditions of the subject. The figure on the far left, dressed in a sumptuous white garb is no doubt the primary patron of the work. Due to the communal nature of the Scuole del Sacramento the patronage of a work such as this would be a group effort. Despite that, it was common for the officers and others in elected positions to crowbar themselves into the composition. Like all offices in Venice, these terms rotated frequently, and therefore many of the officers sought to document their time within their specific Scuola del Sacramento. In the San Marcuola *Last Supper*, Tintoretto's first, the stool of one of the apostles reads "at the time of Iseppo Morandello and brothers."[63] While the San Simeone Profeta work does not stand out, it is the final *Last Supper* to feature the Annunciation of the Betrayal as the focus, indicating Tintoretto's increased engagement with Counter Reformist ideas. In the works that follow the commission for San Simeone Profeta, there is a profound shift in both iconography and business strategy of Tintoretto. An analysis of several critical events within his life also allows for the reconsideration of Tintoretto's signature market manipulation, revealing that it was a very personal form of Catholic theological praxis.

Praxis

An analysis of Jacopo's late business practices showcases a pattern of generosity and bargaining that insured his works could be found in every corner of the city. Although seemingly unrelated, Tintoretto's exceptionally low prices and gift giving constituted a very personal form

[62] Worthen, "Paintings for the Banco," 720-723.
[63] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 48.

of charity, while the imagery within his works sought to spread the types of piety associated with the Counter Reformation. The critical consensus among scholars is that these gifts and cheap commissions were a way to flood the market and ensure a steady stream of work. These interpretations of Tintoretto have been too reductive and static to explain the discrepancies found in a career that lasted over fifty years. Many of the conclusions presented by scholars do not fit well with the documented events that were unfolding in Tintoretto's life during the 1570s. Arguments made to serve the business-first portrayal of Tintoretto frequently obscure an opposed yet persuasive notion, that in his late career piety was a driving factor in his work. Due to the gifting and cheap commissions, Tintoretto was chastised by other painters within his lifetime for debasing their craft by working for such low rates and gifting works to many patrons.[64] At times, however, Tintoretto's actions went so far beyond that which would be required to increase his share in the Venetian art market, that his actions were more than just a business strategy. Certainly, after Titian's death due to the plague in 1576 it would have behooved Tintoretto to adopt a shrewder pricing strategy, and yet his generosity remained. One of the most prevalent themes in the scholarship of Tintoretto is his business acumen; however, some scholars seem content with accepting that his marketing strategies remained static during a career that lasted over five decades. Yet several cases stand out amongst the many commissions undertaken by him that illustrate a pattern of behavior that is counterintuitive to the growth and maintenance of a successful *bottega*.

Given the information available regarding Tintoretto's commissions, financial status, and various events that occurred in Venice, it seems most likely that his shift in motivation occurred in or around 1578. While the year 1548 is considered the watershed moment within Tintoretto's

[64] Ilchman, "Venetian Painting," 25.

career, the period from 1576-1578 is equally important but often overlooked. A string of events during the 1570s ended in the eventual restructuring of Tintoretto's workshop in 1578, allowing him to shift his motivations when donating and pricing paintings. The cascade of events began in 1574, the year in which Tintoretto purchased a house in the San Marziale parish, which allowed him to expand his workshop. Also in 1574, Tintoretto was granted the *senseria* from the Fondaco dei Tedeschi which should have provided him a steady income of 100 ducats per year and rendered him the *de facto* state painter.[65] Furthermore, the Palazzo Ducale caught fire, after which Tintoretto was awarded many commissions from the Venetian government during the repair effort.[66] On August 27th, 1576, Titian died of the plague; his death left Tintoretto and Veronese as the two most prominent painters in Venice and opened up new possibilities for patronage, both home and abroad.

On May 30th, 1577, Tintoretto was granted a revision of his taxes stemming from a petition in 1575 in which Tintoretto claims to be impoverished and having a difficult time supporting his large family of eight children.[67] The Tintoretto family's apparent poverty was not helped by the fact that he never received any payment from the *senseria* he had been granted in 1574.[68] The stability provided by the *senseria* would have been a major boon for Tintoretto, instead the state's failure to pay his yearly 100 ducat stipend would have only left him in a more precarious financial situation. Likely in lieu of the *senseria*, on November 27th, 1577, Tintoretto successfully petitioned for an annual payment of 100 ducats from the Scuola Grande di San

[65] Linda Borean, "Documentation," in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 431

[66] 1574/1575 is also the year in which the San Polo *Last Supper* was completed. That work being the first iteration to showcase the Eucharist and set the tone for the remaining Last Suppers over the next twenty years.

[67] In the documentation Tintoretto states that he had "[no] income, nor any kind of industry, except my little bit of occupation, with the great burden I have," by which he meant his many children; Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 55; Borean, "Documentation," 431.

[68] In his will, dictated on May 30th, 1594, Tintoretto wishes for his wife Faustina to elect a child or grandchild to receive the payments should they ever be fulfilled. Echols and Ilchman, *Tintoretto: Artist*, 229.

Rocco in exchange for three large paintings every year before the Feast of San Rocco.[69] By removing the act of negotiating the price, Tintoretto's works were no longer commissions, but instead a form of *elemosina,* or a payment made to individuals who performed a pious service, a standard practice with the scuole. Pullan notes that the scuole regarded *elemosine* as "a small payment for a pious service" rather than a wage.[70] When viewed as compensation for pious acts, Tintoretto's stipend from the Scuola Grande di San Rocco redefines the nature of his painting cycle for the Scuola. Tintoretto becomes a character from his own imagination, a pious actor from within his own paintings; the works are now votive offerings created "out of pure devotion to religion, state, and Scuola."[71] Frederick Ilchman sees Tintoretto's works at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco as a summation of how "self-promotion and his piety were intertwined."[72] It is here, in the 1570s, that we see Tintoretto adapt his persona to correspond to the ideal artisan that is central to the Myth of Venice, one who thinks of faith before compensation. In plying his trade for piety rather than payment, Tintoretto's craft became a tool to visualize and espouse the teachings of Christ, while simultaneously broadcasting the piety of his patrons and their organizations. Tintoretto's price for these works highlights that his primary concern was not monetary, as the agreed sum of 100 ducats per year would be well below the valuation of the paintings that he delivered annually.

The payments from San Rocco did provide him with some stable income; however, the price per painting was still incredibly cheap. Tintoretto's total income from completing *all* of the

[69] Borean, "Documentation," 434.
[70] Pullan, *Rich and Poor,* 77.
[71] Paul Hills, "Tintoretto's Marketing," *Venedig und Oberdeutschland in der Renaissance: Beziehungen zwischen Kunst und Wirtschaft* (1993): 117.
[72] Despite recognizing Tintoretto's piety in these instances, Hills' and Ilchman's analyses of Tintoretto's commissions tend to support the notion that the central facet of Tintoretto's artistic persona was his business model rather than his piety; Frederick Ilchman, "Jacopo Tintoretto in Process: The Making of a Venetian Master, 1540-1560" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), 298.

paintings within the Scuola Grande di San Rocco amounts to slightly over 2200 ducats, spread out over more than two decades.[73] In comparison, the inlaid floor of the *Albergo* alone had cost the Scuola 3000 ducats; given the large size of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, 2200 ducats for dozens of paintings (many of them large *laterali*) is astonishingly cheap.[74] One of the main purposes of the scuole was to insure the wellbeing of their members; as an institution that transferred excess wealth from rich to poor, the scuole were a safety net for its less fortunate members. Tintoretto's faith in the charitable mechanisms of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco lessened the inherent risk of producing such large works for so little a price.

Very shortly after his petition to the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, another fire broke out in the Palazzo Ducale on December 20th which destroyed a large number of paintings, some of which had been done by Tintoretto in years prior. As had occurred after the previous fire, a barrage of new commissions was awarded to Tintoretto. Finally, in 1578 Jacopo received his most important foreign commission from Guglielmo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. He had sown the seeds for the commission some fifteen years earlier with a gift of a painting depicting "la battaglia turchesca" to Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga.[75] This is all to say that the 1570s were perhaps the most tumultuous time in Tintoretto's career, and as expected it resulted in major restructuring of his business practices.

These events in the 1570s, coupled with Jacopo turning sixty in 1578, culminated in the old master stepping away from the easel and taking on a more managerial position within his workshop.[76] The sheer number of commissions from the state, foreign princes, and scuole, meant

[73] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 49.
[74] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 55.
[75] Hills, "Tintoretto's Marketing," 113.
[76] Robert Echols, "Tintoretto the Painter," in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 55.

that Tintoretto had more work than he could handle. The restructuring of his workshop resulted in an enterprise that was "almost industrial in its size and working methods."[77] With the plethora of commissions, and a family recovering from a precarious financial state, it would have made the most sense for Tintoretto to focus on the expensive and prestigious commissions while delegating the unimportant work to his *bottega*. He seems to have done the opposite in many cases. Had his primary goal been to secure financial safety for his family, it would have benefited him not only to raise his prices, but also to discontinue his practice of focusing on cheap commissions for patrons with little prestige and wealth. It is during this period, post 1578, that Tintoretto's personal focus seems to shift and mirror his iconographic focus on the poor; however, a much earlier example reveals the gradual development of Tintoretto's piety-first business plan.

At the end of Tintoretto's most decisive decade, the 1550s, he approached the Prior of the Madonna dell'Orto and asked to execute two paintings in the choir bays of the church. The Madonna dell'Orto had been Tintoretto's parish church since 1548, and would later be located less than two hundred meters from the house he purchased in 1574; he spent ample time in the church and is buried within the chapel of his wife's family.[78] The two works in the choir bays are the tallest canvases of the Renaissance, each sitting at a staggering forty-eight feet tall and nearly twenty feet wide.[79] The Prior, "deeming that a year's revenue would not be sufficient" to pay Tintoretto, dismissed him. To the chagrin of painters all over the city, Tintoretto offered to paint them for the material cost alone.[80] *The Last Judgement* and *The Making of the Golden Calf* (both c.1559/1560) are the two hallmark examples of Tintoretto's aggressive business strategy: if there

[77] Ilchman, *Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, 198.
[78] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 52.
[79] Ilchman, "Venetian Painting," 25.
[80] Ridolfi, "Life of Tintoretto," 93.

is no commission to be had, invent one, and then offer to do the work for the material cost. These works stand out amongst those paintings that were donated, or done for cost, due to the sheer amount of effort that was required to complete them. Jacopo did not have a *bottega* that was anywhere near the size needed to paint these works in a cost-efficient manner. The works themselves showcase the "intertwined" aspects of Tintoretto's faith and business. Ilchman states that the twin choir paintings "announced to the Venetian public that he and his workshop could undertake the most imposing commissions by themselves. There would be no need to split up major decorative programs among a range of *botteghe*."[81] Awarding large decorative cycles to multiple workshops was the standard practice in Venice, and continued to be, rendering Tintoretto's later decoration of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco all the more unique in its execution. The size of the Madonna dell'Orto canvases also forecasts Tintoretto's readiness to work cheaply, or even at a loss.

The size of these works and the quality of their execution puts the valuation much higher than the 100 ducats he received for the material cost. When contrasted with Titian's commission for Santo Spirito in 1529, the 100 ducats accepted by Tintoretto is mindbogglingly low. In 1529, Titian was forty-one years old, the same age as Tintoretto when he began the Madonna dell'Orto works. Titian's work *The Descent of the Holy Spirit* (1541) was not only delivered over a decade later than the original 1529 commission, but the artist demanded 400 ducats for the work. When the painting began to flake off due to environmental conditions, Titian would only repaint it for another 100 ducts as well as restoration costs.[82] The size of the work is much smaller as well, roughly eighteen feet tall and eight feet wide, the canvas size is approximately 159 square feet. Only taking into account the original cost of 400 ducats, the cost of Titian's work is around 2.5

[81] Ilchman, "Venetian Master," 307.
[82] Tom Nichols, *Titian and the End of the Venetian Renaissance* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 158.

ducats per square foot. In contrast, *one* of the Madonna dell'Orto works by Tintoretto comprises approximately 960 square feet of painted canvas. For both paintings together, Tintoretto was paid about 0.05 ducats per square foot; in other words, Titian charged *fifty* times more than Tintoretto for a religious work when they were both at the same point in their career. Ridolfi seems to chastise Tintoretto for his practice of low pricing; when discussing the Madonna dell'Orto works, Ridolfi says, "But Tintoretto did not know how to profit from this practice. As a result the ground he sowed with great labour yielded but a small harvest, though by right it should have brought him comfort and fortune."[83] Madonna dell'Orto is one of the earliest examples of Tintoretto using painting as a form of piety, a practice which he would eventually adopt fully in his late career. What began as a business strategy would gradually evolve into a form of praxis with which Tintoretto could practice what he preached, or in this case, painted.

Returning to the late 1570s, a period of intensely high output, it is rare to see much of the master's hand in the paintings ascribed to him, and a fully autograph work is nearly unheard of after 1578. Tintoretto's *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1580) (fig. 7) remains one of the most understudied works by the artist. While originally thought to contain workshop involvement, a 2003-2004 restoration of the work revealed the San Silvestro altarpiece to be fully autograph.[84] As such, it is now accepted by scholars as one of the latest fully autograph works of Tintoretto's career. The circumstances surrounding its commission are *critical* to the understanding of Tintoretto's own personal piety and the limits of his public persona. The work is still housed in the church of San Silvestro, for which it was originally painted and was commissioned by the Guild of the

[83] Ridolfi, "Life of Tintoretto," 94.
[84] Frederick Ilchman, "Two Altarpieces of John the Baptist by Jacopo Tintoretto," *Save Venice Conservation Archives* (2004), 24; Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel, "Visions of Faith: San Rocco and the Late Religious Works," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 203; Frederick Ilchman and Edward Saywell, "Michelangelo and Tintoretto: *Disegno* and Drawing," in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 390; Nichols, "Coming of Age," 1028; Ilchman, *Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, 249.

Bargemen (*Scuola dei Peateri*), "seemingly too humble a patron to have received so late in Tintoretto's career a painting as exceptional as this."[85] This work, along with some altar pieces for other *arti*, exemplify the remarkable degree to which Tintoretto's personal commitments were now focused on providing painting as a pious gift for working class Venetians. Especially telling as a comparison in this regard is the *Baptism of Christ* (1579/1581) (fig. 8) completed for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco during the same time period, which features clear workshop intervention in its execution, even if the inventive design was completed by Tintoretto.

From a purely economic standpoint it would have made much more sense for Tintoretto to save his energies for the more valuable commission in San Rocco. Many of the members of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco were wealthy, and although he had been allocated the annual stipend by the Scuola in 1577, his work there still generated him private commissions. Putting his best work on display would have been much more beneficial to ensure further patronage. Aside from the San Rocco works, Tintoretto and his *bottega* were also working on the Mantua pictorial cycle simultaneously. The Gonzaga of Mantua were his most important foreign patrons thus far, and the four paintings executed for them between 1579–1580 rewarded Tintoretto with 234 ducats.[86] The Mantua works were completed almost entirely by his workshop and were delivered, in person by Tintoretto, months after their original deadline.[87] Furthermore, a massive ceiling painting for the Palazzo Ducale was also concurrently painted by his workshop. Given the enormous pressures put upon the workshop after 1578, it is peculiar that Tintoretto would continually focus his efforts on works of little pay and prestige, such as the San Silvestro *Baptism of Christ*.

[85] Ilchman, *Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, 249.
[86] Nichols, *Tradition and Identity*, 322-327.
[87] For correspondences between the two parties involved, see Borean, "Documentation," 437-439.

Many of the works that were neglected were secular history paintings, while the works that consumed his focus were deeply religious in subject. The influx of commissions generated after 1578 afforded Tintoretto enough work that he should not have had the time to focus on paintings that interested him personally. The *Baptism of Christ* for the bargemen's guild would not have paid well; a nearly identically sized altar piece was executed for the Guild of Linen-Weavers (*Scuola dei Tessitori di Seta*) in 1584, for which Tintoretto charged the outlandishly low price of twenty ducats, the same price he usually charged for portraits.[88] In their study on the Venetian trade guilds as art patrons, Peter Humfrey and Richard MacKenney attribute the price of the work to Tintoretto's "sympathies [for] the artisan class."[89] These sympathies have been, and continue to be, an integral part of the rote analysis of Tintoretto's artistic persona. Humfrey and MacKenney's investigation into the *arti*'s role as patrons are used in service of the idea that Tintoretto's rapid completion of works is evidence of economic brilliance.

The financial hardships Tintoretto found himself in during the 1570s contradict this line of thinking, and the continuation of counterintuitive business strategies by the artist serve to demonstrate that there were other factors being considered beyond monetary compensation. While Tintoretto's execution of various altar pieces for *arti* (seven guild altar pieces are documented by Humfrey and MacKenney) certainly follows the standard narrative of Tintoretto's working strategy, it is also an actualization of the charity-focused iconography found within his *Last Supper*s. Tintoretto's upbringing and family history within the guilds system allowed him to sympathize with the working class, as Humfrey and MacKenney have concluded. However, Tintoretto was able to provide these paintings as a form of almsgiving, and as such the

[88] Peter Humfrey and Richard MacKenney, "The Venetian Trade Guilds as Patrons of Art in the Renaissance," *Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 998 (May 1986): 322, 329.
[89] Humfrey and MacKenney, "Trade Guilds," 322.

paintings that he personally focused on allowed him to further espouse Counter Reformist teachings, either in subject or in practice while supporting the artisans and merchants in the spirit of Venetian equality and piety.

At this point in his career, Tintoretto's continued identification with, and generosity toward, the artisan class of Venice was abnormal and perhaps even a detriment to his business. When Tintoretto married Faustina Episcopi sometime around 1560, he became a member of the Venetian citizen class (*cittadini*). While *cittadino* status did not by any means guarantee wealth, the artisans and working class of Venice were overwhelmingly made of up the *popolani*. Even though Jacopo was born in Venice, he was not immediately afforded citizenship due to Venetian law, as his father was a Brescian immigrant. To be a *cittadino* one's family had to trace its lineage back to the founding of the city (these families were *cittadini originari*), be granted citizenship based on a government decree, or many years of documented residency and payment of Venetian taxes.[90] As stated previously, Titian and Veronese quickly abandoned their humble roots as soon as it was an option. Tintoretto chose to keep his working-class background at the forefront of his artistic persona. In an anecdote highlighting Jacopo's humility, Ridolfi mentions that Henry III of France offered Tintoretto a knighthood for a portrait that he had secretly painted of the King during his visit to Venice. Tintoretto is said to have "modestly refused" the offer from Henry III.[91] Though it is doubtful that this event transpired exactly as recounted, Tintoretto did complete multiple works for Henry III and it is notable that Ridolfi should mention such a story. Titian's knighthood was one of the cornerstones of his artistic persona and brought him great prestige. It is likely that this anecdote serves as a foil to Titian's status as a Count Palatine

[90] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 40.
[91] Ridolfi, "Life of Tintoretto," 143-145.

and Knight of the Golden Spur. Ridolfi's tale helps to bolster Tintoretto's image as an embodiment of a proper Venetian: humble, equitable, pious, and honorable.

What is remarkable about Tintoretto is that even during the busiest time of his long career he still found the time to personally paint works for small trade guilds, and offer others at a bargain price. Given Tintoretto's appeal for tax relief in 1575, and his wife's similar appeal in 1600, it is clear the he never became wealthy.[92] Looking at an index of Jacopo's commissions and their prices found within Nichols 2015 revised monograph, the rates that he charged throughout his career seem to remain relatively steady after 1548.[93] Over the course of Tintoretto's life inflation soared, equating to roughly a 100% rise.[94] As a result, Tintoretto was effectively losing money by charging the same, or similar, rates during the second half of his life. It is unlikely that Tintoretto, proven to be an astute businessman, would have kept his prices stable in such an environment unless there was an ulterior motive. After 1578 there seems to have been little or no benefit to the continuation of his practices of donating and cheap pricing, which was started to secure new patrons. His prices for works commissioned by the state in the Palazzo Ducale, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, foreign prices, and a plethora of religious buildings, could have (and if he was focused on the financial security of his family, should have) been increased. Portrait painting had become the mainstay of Tintoretto's workshop, with prices ranging from fifteen to twenty-five ducats. The reuse of figural forms documented by Falomir allowed Tintoretto to rapidly and efficiently fabricate portraits which became the foundation of his workshop during the latter part of his career.[95] Due to the sheer number of commissions even

[92] Nichols, "Tintoretto family."
[93] Nichols, *Tradition and Identity*, 322-327.
[94] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 55; Paul Hills notes that there is little evidence to suggest that the average price per painting kept pace with the average price per unit of grain. The lower purchasing power of the ducat resulted in nearly all manufacturing industries massively increasing their output; Hills, "Tintoretto's Marketing," 108.
[95] Falomir. 95-114.

a slight increase in price would have resulted in a massive profit. In effect Tintoretto became a loss leader in the field of Venetian painting, and it is only through a staggering number of commissions that he was able to make ends meet.[96]

Ridolfi tells us that Jacopo was a very generous and humble man, often painting works for the material cost alone, as was the case in the Madonna dell'Orto.[97] His practice of giving away paintings was synonymous with his identity as a working-class Venetian. Within Nichols' index of commissions mentioned above, 25% of them were donated or paid for at lower than the valuation.[98] Tintoretto's haste to give paintings is perhaps one of the most ubiquitous aspects of the scholarship pertaining to his career. Undoubtedly the most well-known anecdote of his gift giving is the story of the competition for the commission of a ceiling painting in the meeting room (*Sala dell'Albergo*) in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. The tale is first recounted in Giorgio Vasari's 1568 expanded edition of *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects,* in which Tintoretto was relegated to the equivalent of a footnote.[99] The officers of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco tasked several painters, Tintoretto among them, to produce a compositional drawing for the circular ceiling space in the Sala dell'Albergo. With the aid of

[96] Hills argues that Tintoretto's focus on piety in his late career was a marketing strategy to "[elevate] his art above mercantile values just when mercantile values were becoming increasingly evident, even in the field of religious art." Yet Tintoretto's personal focus on providing religious works for artisans and scuole did not provide him with financial stability, as is evident in the various documents related to his family's finances. Thus, the view that Tintoretto's pious donations were principally a business ploy comes to seem dubious. However, near the end of Hills' analysis of Tintoretto's marketing strategies, he begins to come around to the idea that perhaps these strategies were not all in the name of monetary gain and that Tintoretto may have been able to "indulge his genuinely pious instincts" late his career. Despite recognizing this, Hills still sees these pious instincts as a way to secure the wellbeing of Tintoretto's family. His wife Faustina's plea for financial assistance in 1600 makes clear that less than a decade after the artist's death his family's wellbeing was not secure. With this in mind I do not believe Hills takes his argument far enough in regard to piety being Tintoretto's primary concern after the events of the 1570s; Hills, "Tintoretto's Marketing," 120.
[97] Ridolfi, "Life of Tintoretto," 93.
[98] Nichols, *Tradition and Identity*, 322-327.
[99] Amusingly, the relegation of Tintoretto (as well as Andrea Schiavone) to a subsection of the biography of Battista Franco provoked the scorn of El Greco, whose copy of Vasari's book includes many notes. El Greco wrote that "there's as much pictorial skill in the worst painting by Tintoretto as clumsiness in the finest by Battista Franco of Venice or Giorgio Vasari." El Greco, "Notes" in *Lives of Tintoretto,* ed. Carlo Cosato (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2019), 50.

several members of the Scuola, Tintoretto sneaked into the building and took measurements for the painting. When the artists were at the Scuola to present their drawings for assessment, Tintoretto instead revealed a finished painting hanging in place.[100] The members of the Scuola were outraged at this deception and refused to accept the painting. Tintoretto instead offered it as a gift, saying that he would give it to the Scuola free of charge.

The business acumen of Tintoretto was superb when it came to securing work for himself and his *bottega*. Titian's affluent and prestigious European clientele meant that only the wealthiest Venetians could afford his services. It would be incorrect to claim, however, as many authors have, that Tintoretto did not seek foreign patrons due to his deep seated *venezianità*. On occasion work was done for foreign clientele, the nature of which meant that the patron was always wealthy. Some external patronage came before Titian's death, although the overwhelming majority came shortly after. Not long after Titian's passing Tintoretto had commissions from Philip II in Madrid, Rudolf II in Prague, the Fugger family in Augsburg, and of course the Gonzaga of Mantua discussed previously.[101] Despite these wealthy and powerful patrons paying handsomely for his work, Tintoretto did relatively few commissions for them. Veronese was poised to replace Titian as the European aristocracy's favorite Italian painter and was even offered the spectacular sum of 9,000 ducats to be Philip II's court painter.[102] What is special about Tintoretto's practice was the continued support of non-wealthy clients, the cheap pricing and gift giving that continued decades later than needed, and of course the iconographic

[100] The other artists included Paolo Veronese, Andrea Schiavone, Giuseppe Porta (called Giuseppe Salviati), and Federico Zuccari. Giorgio Vasari, "Life of Tintoretto," in *Lives of Tintoretto*, ed. Carlo Cosato (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2019), 45-47.
[101] John Maricari, *Drawing in Tintoretto's Venice* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2018), 115.
[102] Nichols, *Tradition and Identity*, 170.

focus on the sick and impoverished that featured so prominently throughout his oeuvre, and notably for our purpose, his *Last Supper*s.

Piety

The *Last Supper* of San Polo (1574/1575) (fig. 9) is the most noticeable departure from established convention to be found in Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s. Later versions continued to alter the standard formula of Last Supper paintings (i.e. Annunciation of the Betrayal, grand setting, parallel to the picture plane); however, the San Polo work is the iconographic foundation for Tintoretto's remaining iterations of the subject. The entire setting of the work is incomprehensible; the banquet room with a tiled floor leads to an open-air vista of a landscape with antique buildings and rolling hills. As with the antique loggia in the San Trovaso version there is no clear entry or exit point for the work. Furthermore, to add to the disorientation, the floor itself is skewed in a way that lends "instability" and "energy" to the image as a whole.[103] With the beggar laying prone on the ground, it is almost as if the figures are sliding off of a chess board and into our space. The boy accepting an apple from an apostle sits close to the edge of the room, where the murky transition to the outdoors looks suspiciously steep. Despite the visual discord, the iconography of the painting is the most daring feature of the work.

Breaking with the ideological framework of the previous *Last Supper*s, the San Polo *Last Supper* depicts the Institution of the Eucharist rather than the Annunciation of the Betrayal. The ambiguous and unstable setting of the work reinforces the miraculous nature of the subject matter, with the location of the meal serving as a conduit for divine energy. The viewer's struggle to understand the geometry of the scene mirrors the reactions of the apostles, many of

[103] Mattia Biffis, "Storyteller: Sacred Narratives," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 117.

whom throw their arms out wildly as they witness the miraculous transformation of the bread before them. Tintoretto's change in subject matter is critical and reflects the increased importance of the Eucharist after the conclusion of the Council of Trent more than a decade before this work was completed. In a similar fashion to the San Simeone Profeta work some years prior, Christ is not centered within the painting. He leans forward with arms outstretched, prognosticating his imminent crucifixion, and hands the bread of his body to the apostles. The humanity of Christ is stressed through his crucified pose, reminding the viewer of his death, while his divinity is reinforced through the transubstantive properties of the bread he offers. Just as Christ gave his body to the apostles, one of them mirrors his outstretched arm and offers nourishment to the sprawling beggar in the foreground. The boy being offered an apple emphasizes the Scuola del Sacremento's commitment to Good Works and refutes the Lutheran insistence on justification by faith alone. Rather than including the figures of Faith and Charity, the principles espoused by such virtues are actualized in the events of the work.[104] The previous abstraction of such virtues isolated them from the narrative and failed to highlight the actual doing of the good deeds. The setting remains humble in nature, with simple seating and a table that seems too small for all of the apostles. The multiple instances of charity throughout the work reinforce the spiritual and physical needs of the everyman; Christ's charity sustains the apostles' spiritual health, while the apostles in turn sustain the physical health of the beggars. The iconography on display is a succinct distillation of Counter Reformist ideology and serves to renounce the Protestant insistence on justification exclusively through faith.[105] It is this idea of faith through charity that would sustain the later business practices of Tintoretto's workshop.

[104] David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156.
[105] Hills, "Piety and Patronage," 33.

Painted not long after the San Polo *Last Supper*, the 1576 version (fig. 10) housed in San Stefano, originally for Santa Margherita, alters the formulae of San Trovaso and San Polo and changes the setting of the work. The location of the meal is now understandable, taking place on the porch of a stone building. The furnishings remain humble, with wooden stools and a simple linen cloth covering the table. Christ remains uncentered, here shown in profile offering bread to an apostle. The Eucharist is again the focus of the scene, although this time it is much more subtly depicted, Tintoretto having done away with the crucified pose as the bread is handed out. To stress the humility of Christ, and as an extension the Scuola itself, a beggar is placed at the bottom of the steps, in close proximity to him. The insistence within Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s to showcase "the equality of man in Christ" is foregrounded by character interactions such as this.[106] Charity and Faith return and accompany the figures on the steps, although instead of servers or maids they are depicted here as mendicants. Historian Jutta Sperling associates these different allegorical representations and their relationships with the viewer, each other, and the biblical figures, to "express the reciprocity of giving and receiving."[107] As discussed before, the poor would receive tangible aid from the scuole (hospices, dowries, housing), while those that gave would receive prayers and the spiritual affirmation associated with Good Works. In the case of the Scuole del Sacramento, all of the members would bolster their faith by participating in the proper veneration of the Eucharist, and the charitable acts that would follow.

Expanding on the ideas presented in the San Stefano *Last Supper*, the San Rocco *Last Supper* (1578–1581) (fig. 11) is one of the few *Last Supper*s not commissioned by a Scuola del Sacramento, instead commissioned by the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. The Scuola Grande di San Rocco occupies a special place in Tintoretto's story; he was accepted as a brother

[106] Nichols, "Tintoretto family."
[107] Sperling, "Allegories," 125.

(*confratello*) within the Scuola on March 11th, 1565, and would go on to hold many offices within the Scuola during the remainder of his life.[108] His role in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco was unprecedented, not only within the Scuola but in Venice as a whole. As noted, on November 27th, 1577, Tintoretto submitted a declaration to the Scuola stating his intention to "dedicate the rest of [his] life to [San Roch's] service" in recognition of his "devotion to the glorious messer San Roch" in addition to the "love he bears" for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco.[109] The iconography of Tintoretto's paintings for San Rocco illustrates an unparalleled level of occupation with the poor, sick, and infirm. Saint Roch's miraculous healing of the plague stricken was portrayed very early in Jacopo's career for the Scuola in *St. Roch Healing the Plague Victims* (1549). By the end of his life, Tintoretto had completed all of the works within the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, and its decoration remains his magnum opus, as well as one of the largest collections of religious art by a single artist anywhere in the world.[110]

The San Rocco *Last Supper* builds upon the San Stefano work and further evolves Tintoretto's fixation with the impoverished. Unlike the San Stefano work, the San Rocco *Last Supper* expands upon the background in terms of both characters and setting. Most of the apostles are on their knees to emphasize their humanity and humility. Christ himself is located at the back of the group presenting the Host to Peter and has been rendered much smaller than the other figures to further stress his humility. Tintoretto has aligned the table with the High Altar located within the Sala Superiore in San Rocco to extend the pictorial space into the real space of the Scuola. The work is located directly across from the entrance to the room, making it one of

[108] Borean, "Documentation," 426.
[109] Rosand, "*Sixteenth-Century Venice*", 160-161.
[110] The Scuola Grande di San Rocco is often referred to as the Sistine Chapel of Venice due to the overwhelming presence of so many high-quality works from one artist; Linda Borean, "Collectiong in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Venice: Originals, Copies, and "Maniera di," in *Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston: MFA Publications, 2009), 63.

the first things to be seen upon entry into the space. Communicants would then feel an active connection to the scene as they are performing the same actions shown within the work.[111] Christ's location in the painting is linked to the beggar seated in the bottom left, mirroring each other's poses. Christ's position at the far end of the room aligns him with the beggar at the fore and although they would be far from one another within the physical space of the room, they are rendered quite close on the canvas due to the perspective of the work. As Christ is participating in a charitable act, and as the beggar himself calls out for charity implicitly, the beggar's status is elevated to that of Christ-like in his visual and figural association with Jesus.[112] The man, woman, and dog, are shown to be participating in the meal; as Jutta Sperling notes, the man is in possession of a loaf of *mantovanina*, the same kind of bread the apostles are shown to be eating.[113] The woman is seated next to a pitcher, presumably full of wine. Together these two figures possess the body and blood of Christ, underscoring the spiritually nourishing properties of the charity they have received. The room in which the meal takes place resembles a pub or some other public dining hall. In the background there are several figures in a kitchen area, shown in equal size to many of the apostles. While the dish-laden cupboard in the background looms large over the scene, suggesting a more refined setting, the architecture of the room is assembled from bricks and wood. The materiality of the dining hall suggests a less elegant environment than the gilded room in which the painting is housed. Furthermore, the attendants of the meal are rough and real, working men and women in their hand spun and well-worn clothing. The general trend of Tintoretto to portray servants and beggars with "the same dignity as saints,"

[111] Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Almost a Prophet: The Art of Jacopo Tintoretto," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 27.
[112] Nichols, *Tradition and Identity*, 261.
[113] The *mantovanina* is also present in Tintoretto's *Elijah Multiplying the Bread*, also completed for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in the same year; Sperling, "Allegories," 124.

was unusual among the most prominent painters of the time, and differed greatly from the imagery of Titian and Veronese.[114]

Titian's *St. John the Almsgiver* (c.1545) (fig. 12) and Veronese's *The Feast in the House of Levi* (1573) (fig. 13) illustrate the fundamental differences in the iconography and visual techniques used by these two men, and Tintoretto.[115] Titian's work features St. John handing out alms to a poor man that occupies the lower left corner of the work. Immediately the stark difference from Tintoretto is seen in the rendition of the beggar. Whereas Jacopo bathes them in light, paints them larger than Christ, puts them next to Christ, and gives them holy bread, Titian's beggar is shrouded in darkness and cut off from the central narrative of the work. Quite literally marginalized, the beggar is a prop to emphasize the spiritual purity of the saint, rather than a character within the story. What light does fall upon the man seems to radiate from the saint's hand, as it illuminates the pauper's hand. The light's cleansing effect does not cover the beggar even as he receives his charity, informing the viewer that the beggar's "gain in the transaction was limited to the non-spiritual."[116] Within the versions of Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s that display the Eucharist as the pivotal moment, Christ is rarely in the light and is more often the source of the light. In the San Stefano version, the poor women's face is more luminous than all of the apostles *and* Christ. The beggars in the San Rocco *Last Supper* are similarly portrayed, with Christ himself being hard to spot, save for the glow around his head.

Veronese's *The Feast in the House of Levi* is filled with eclectic and baffling imagery that greatly contrasts with the feast paintings of Tintoretto. Veronese's *Feast* was originally a

[114] Echols, "Tintoretto the Painter," 31.
[115] Bonifacio de' Pitati, with whom Tintoretto may have apprenticed very early in his career, also portrayed the impoverished as twisted and maligned. In his work *Madonna of the Tailors* (1533) the pauper in the lower left corner is shockingly contorted. The beggar's appearance is used to juxtapose the beauty, and therefore piety, of the Madonna and her companions; Tom Nichols, "Secular Charity, Sacred Poverty: Picturing the Poor in Renaissance Venice," *Art History* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 153-154.
[116] Nichols, "Tintoretto's Poverty," 104.

rendition of the Last Supper; however, the imagery was found to be so distasteful that the artist was required to testify in front of the newly formed Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition and eventually change the name (therefore changing the subject) of the work. Particularly, the religious authorities within the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo thought that the inclusion of "German soldiers" and "buffoons" detracted from the narrative of the work and muddied the overall meaning of the subject.[117] The general cacophony of Veronese's feasts could not be more dissimilar from the relatively somber meals depicted by Tintoretto. Veronese's defense was that he had excluded these figures from the central arch of the loggia. In effect, the center of the painting was the area which contained the religious significance, while the remainder was subject to artistic license (which he also claimed).[118]

Veronese's *Last Supper* (c.1580) (fig. 14) features another use of architectural division, again separating Christ and the apostles from the beggars and servants. A common practice within Veronese's religious paintings, the architectural separation essentially renders beggars and non-holy figures as nothing more than a prop within the painting. One of the central facets of Tintoretto's narrative works are the interactions, or implied interactions, between the characters. In the San Polo *Last Supper*, the inclusion of a pauper relates to the story and meaning of the work because we see an apostle handing out bread to him. Furthermore, in the San Rocco *Last Supper*, the act of giving is not shown but implied by the beggar already being in possession of the same bread the apostles are eating. The act of charity had been completed before the apostles received the bread, having put the needs of the poor before the needs of themselves. In Veronese's *Last Supper* the mendicant on the far right is closer to an auxiliary table than that of

[117] Tom Nichols, *Renaissance Art in Venice: From Tradition to Individualism* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016), 166.
[118] Nichols, *Individualism*, 166.

the holy meal. The young girl who provides him with charity has little relation to the party of the apostles across the dining area. In essence, the imagery with Veronese's feast scenes is segregated by architecture, and anything outside of the central area does not relate to the narrative of the scene.

Veronese used the margins of his work to include a variety of figures that do not interact with the meaning of the painting's narrative. Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s (as well as a plethora of his other religious works) invert that practice by placing figures around the margins of the paintings that are central to the narrative and its message as it relates to the real world. The San Marcuola *Last Supper*, Tintoretto's earliest, features Charity and Faith along the margins of the painting. Rather than simply filling space, their carrying of the bread and wine comment on their identities, and purpose, as Charity and Faith. The bread that Charity brings is representative not only of Christ's body, but the need to nourish the poor through charitable works. Faith carries wine which will transform into the Blood of Christ, reminding the viewer of their ultimate salvation through His Blood. Within later versions of the work, such as San Polo, San Stefano, and San Rocco, the beggars occupy marginal positions but have an active role in the narrative. Tintoretto's use of the margins serves to counter the common practice of segregation that was frequently applied to impoverished figures.

Returning to Tintoretto's *Last Supper*s, two different treatments of the subject were executed in the final years of his life. The *Last Supper* in the Cattedrale di San Martino in the city of Lucca (1592–1594) (fig. 15) was very likely a product of his son Domenico.[119] The work

[119] This work is noted in the 1982 catalogue raisonné by Rodolfo Palluchini and Paola Rossi to be by Domenico Tintoretto. Although many works within Jacopo's later years were painted by Domenico, attribution to Domenico is usually reserved for works in which his input consisted of more than just the execution. That being said, the other *Last Supper* completed by Tintoretto in 1594 is most certainly designed by Jacopo and shares many visual elements with the San Martino version above. Therefore, it seems most plausible that the present work was partially designed and painted by Domenico, who iterated on his father's designs for San Giorgio Maggiore to distinguish the two works.

features many of the iconographic hallmarks of Tintoretto's previous *Last Supper*s; however, the spiritual elements and the painting's finish are unlike many of Tintoretto's late works. The coloration of the image is drastically different from the various *Last Supper*s known to be wholly designed by Jacopo. The characteristically rough finish has been refined to offer a more sensuous appearance. Noticeably brighter and more radiant, the colors of this work expand greatly upon the relatively small palette used previously. Wherein Christ and the apostles had worn very drab robes of red, yellow, green, and blue, they now wear bright orange, sumptuous purple, gold, crimson, and many other colors. The *mantovanina* from San Rocco returns, prominently placed on the edge of the table, directly below Christ as he administers the Eucharist. The chandelier above Christ has been blown out by the divine energy radiating from him, as angels rush in to witness the sacrament. The light in the painting emanates from Christ's divine presence, bathing all of the figures within the scene in a warm glow. The otherworldly elements of the composition are a new addition to the Last Supper formula that Tintoretto had been developing for nearly five decades. Cherubim ensconced in billowing clouds surround Christ, resulting in a portal-like effect that goes unnoticed by all within the work. On the left there are dozens of plates sitting on shelving, perhaps a callback to the same imagery found in the back of the San Rocco *Last Supper*. The combination of these factors, the vivid coloring specifically, points to the conclusion that Domenico had much more influence on the design of this iteration than he may have had on previous treatments.

Included in the lower right corner is a lounging charity figure, not unusual for a Tintoretto work, however here she is shown breastfeeding. Jutta Sperling has noted that many images of breastfeeding women appear throughout San Rocco, as a stand-in for Venice's most

vulnerable population: young, single mothers.[120] In Tintoretto's imagery of breastfeeding women, they are portrayed with a significance that betrayed their position within Venetian society. Almsgiving within Venice was carefully regulated to maintain the existing class structure; certain groups were of lower priority than others. Labelled as "undeserving poor", able-bodied men, single mothers, and the chronically impoverished were of less importance than "marriageable virgins, foundlings, and the shame-faced poor" (impoverished nobility).[121] Sperling sees Tintoretto's frequent inclusion of breastfeeding women as a subtle form of subversive political messaging.[122] Pullan and Brown both note that the extravagance of the Scuole Grandi was frequently chastised by the public and government alike.[123] The iconography of Tintoretto's religious works, many of which were housed in Scuole Grandi or very lavish parish churches, sought to rectify the perceptions caused by the outwardly lavish buildings and ornamentation. The focus on vulnerable populations, such as impoverished breastfeeding women, serve to remind the patrons of his works of their duty to those around them. Within a religious context, breastfeeding women have a deep history, from the Lactating Madonna (*Madonna Lactans*) to allegories of Charity. Just as Christ nourishes mankind with his body, so too does a breastfeeding mother provide vital sustenance using her body. Charity is frequently shown feeding multiple children, implying that some of them are not her own. The indiscriminate generosity shown by Charity runs parallel to the ideals of the Scuole del Sacramento, both in their espoused goals and their socially varied administration. Her marginal position again relates to the practice of expanding the main narrative through the use of non-

[120] Sperling, "Allegories," 120.
[121] Sperling, "Allegories," 120.
[122] Sperling, "Allegories," 120.
[123] Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 126; See Patricia Fortini Brown, "Honor and Necessity: The Dynamics of Patronage in the Confraternities of Renaissance Venice," *Studi Veneziani* 9 (1987).

central figures. Within the context of the San Martino *Last Supper*, the breastfeeding woman illustrates the tangible value of Good Works and the effect it will have on the material and spiritual conditions of both the recipient and the provider.

The final *Last Supper* (1592–1594) (fig. 16) produced by Tintoretto, for San Giorgio Maggiore, perfected decades of innovation to portray a deeply nuanced scene that combines many aspects of his previous treatments of the subject. The ethereal light within the work emanates from only two sources, the chandelier hanging in the left-hand corner of the work, and the divine illumination from Christ himself. Angels surround the room in an otherworldly haze while the participants of the meal are all focused on other goings-on. While the angels within the San Martino work were corporeal, here they are akin to apparitions. The combination of lighting and the rendering of the angels provides a sensory experience to the viewer akin to that of a religious vision.[124] A large number of servants are preoccupied with the collection of food, which resembles their own Eucharistic gesture. Jesus has returned to the center of the work; however, because of the depth of the space and the dramatic foreshortening he is much smaller than many of the servants and the lone beggar on the left.

The crippled beggar (*impotento*) is the largest figure in the work, competing only with the server on the right in terms of size. These two figures act as bookends to the scene and form a triangular connection with Christ. As the Eucharist is administered by Jesus, the server looks in the beggar's direction as he is gathering food, while the beggar looks toward an apostle. The arrangement of these three figures is cyclical; the church espouses charitable acts, which are then provided to those in need by members of the community, who in turn look toward the church for further salvation. Christ serves as a beacon within the image, to draw attention to the Eucharist

[124] Nichols, "Tintoretto family."

and steady the viewers within the uneasy perspective of the work. Similar to the San Polo work, the skewed perspective and oblique angle of the work undermines the stability of the painting. Like the San Rocco work, the painting itself becomes an extension of the High Altar. The priest and communicants become stand-ins for Christ and his apostles, elevating the Institution of the Eucharist and those who partake in it.[125] As Tintoretto's final *Last Supper*, and one of the last works to exit his *bottega* before his death, the San Giorgio Maggiore iteration acts as the zenith of decades of innovation and experimentation. The unrivaled focus on charitable acts and the poor found within these works is echoed through Tintoretto's own pious practices; the stylistic development of these works mirrored the spiritual and economic developments of the man and his practices.

Posterity

The *Last Supper*s of Tintoretto serve as a succinct timeline of his evolution as both a painter and Venetian. The beginning works focus on the humble nature of the apostles and seek to translate the Last Supper into a recognizable and empathetic format. His focus on charity as an actionable and central element of Christianity is found within the iconography of his works. Nearly all of his post-Tridentine *Last Supper*s feature an intense preoccupation with the Institution of the Eucharist. Through the focus on the Eucharist, Tintoretto foregrounds the ideas of almsgiving as a way to ameliorate the spiritual and material conditions of the world. Just as Christ provides the apostles with spiritual nourishment through the bread that is his body, so too should his followers provide for those in need. Jacopo's final *Last Supper*s minimize the role of

[125] Nichols, "Tintoretto family."

Christ in favor of increased focus on the impoverished, infirm, and working class within the works.

The twin canvases for Madona dell'Orto foretell the implementation of piety through painting that would be a hallmark of Tintoretto's pricing, gifting, and patronage. Tintoretto ultimately reorganized his workshop after a chain of events in the 1570s that resulted in a stupendous influx of commissions. The strategy of quick, cheap, and high-quality paintings that served as the backbone of his career continued after 1578 when alternative methods of business would have been much more lucrative and stable. While the increased output of his workshop allowed it to take on much more prestigious patrons, Tintoretto himself remained focused on religious works for non-wealthy patrons. His background as a struggling *popolano* continued to be felt late in his career as he repeatedly showcased sympathies to Venice's working class when it would have been much more economical to eschew them in favor of the wealthy, as Titian and Veronese had. The fully autograph *Baptism of Christ* for the *Scuola dei Peateri* serves as the exemplar of Tintoretto's praxis through the support for both the scuole and *arti* of Venice. Adopting the role of a loss leader within the Venetian art market allowed for the rapid spread of his religious works throughout the city. With the increased focus on poverty and charity this would ultimately result in the spread of Tintoretto's personal values. In effect, Tintoretto's paintings were an implementation of his faith, or as David Rosand put it: "the act of painting thus becomes a gesture of piety."[126]

Posthumously Tintoretto became synonymous with *venezianità* and was lauded by his biographers during the seventeenth century. As Anna Lepschy documents in *Tintoretto Observed*, his reputation and critical analysis has been anything but consistent over the centuries.

[126] Rosand, *Sixteenth-Century Venice*, 161.

One key aspect of the writing on Tintoretto is how inseparable he is from Venice. A reaction to Tintoretto is a reaction to Venice, and vice versa.[127] The ebbs and flows of Tintoretto's popularity stem from the different sociocultural attitudes of the time. His popularity reached a low point in the eighteenth century, summarized best by the mere £52.10 paid for *The Origins of the Milky Way* (c. 1577–1579) in London in the year 1800.[128] During the nineteenth century scholars such as John Ruskin and Hippolyte Taine boosted Tintoretto's renown during the Romantic era. Artists in the nineteenth century such as Gustave Courbet and Paul Cézanne admired Tintoretto's loose facture and energetic figures. In short, the nineteenth century saw a revival of Tintoretto that has continued to this day.

Within Venice Tintoretto's presence looms large; he completed as many as double the paintings of any other artist per year.[129] He decorated more scuole, churches, and government buildings than any other artist in Venice. His workshop produced portraits at a blinding speed, ensuring that many of the city's elite had their likeness taken by Tintoretto. Titian's decreased output of portraiture after the 1550s saw Tintoretto pick up the slack, and allowed him to execute more patrician and state portraits than Veronese.[130] The deep connection between the values of the Venetian Republic and the virtues of the Christian faith inseparably linked Tintoretto's paintings with the doctrine and tenets of the Venetian state and the scuole. His works can be seen as a distillation and actualization of the scuole's entire purpose. Despite all of this, many of his works are no longer in Venice. A plethora are lost, destroyed, or known only through descriptions by contemporary authors. Many of the meeting houses and churches that were once adorned by his work have since been demolished, their paintings shipped across the globe. A

[127] Lepschy, *Tintoretto Observed*, 12.
[128] Roughly £5200 today; Lepschy, *Tintoretto Observed*, 61.
[129] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 42.
[130] Brown, "Where the Money Flows," 53.

tour of Venice still features an overwhelming number of Tintoretto's works, but in his day, there would hardly be a corner of the city that he had not decorated with images of piety, poverty, and overwhelming beauty.

Figure List

Figure 1:
Tintoretto, *The Miracle of St Mark Freeing the Slave*. 1548. Oil on canvas.
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Figure 2:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*. 1547. Oil on canvas.
San Marcuola, Venice.

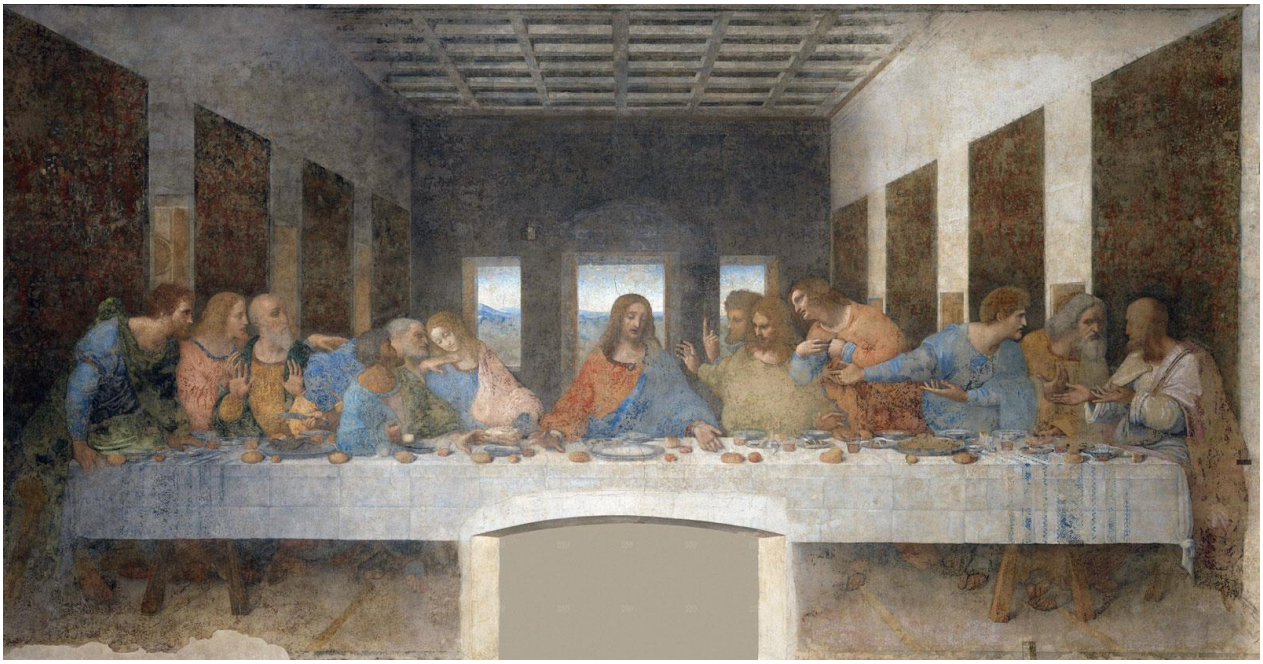

Figure 3:
Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*. 1498. Mixed technique.
Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

Figure 4:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*. 1559. Oil on canvas.
Originally for San Felice, Venice. Church of Saint-Francois-Xavier, Paris.

Figure 5:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*. 1563/1564. Oil on canvas.
San Trovaso, Venice.

Figure 6:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*, after 1568. Oil on canvas.
San Simeone Profeta, Venice.

Figure 7:
Tintoretto, *Baptism of Christ*, c.1580. Oil on canvas.
San Silvestro, Venice.

Figure 8:
Tintoretto, *Baptism of Christ*, 1579/1581. Oil on canvas.
Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice.

Figure 9:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*. 1574/1575. Oil on canvas.
San Polo, Venice.

Figure 10:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper.* 1576. Oil on canvas.
Originally for Santa Margherita, Venice. San Stefano, Venice.

Figure 11:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper*. 1578-1581. Oil on canvas.
Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice.

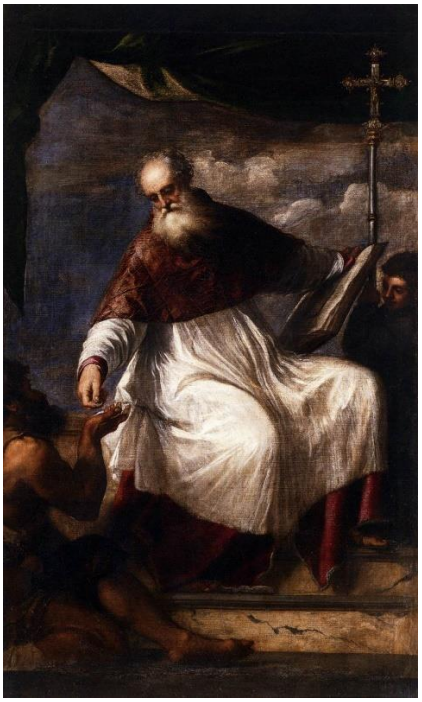

Figure 12:
Titian, *St. John the Almsgiver*, c.1545. Oil on canvas.
San Giovanni Elemosinario, Venice.

Figure 13:
Veronese, *The Feast in the House of Levi*, 1573. Oil on canvas.
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Figure 14:
Veronese, *Last Supper*, c.1580. Oil on canvas.
Brera, Milan.

Figure 15:
Domenico Tintoretto after Jacopo Tintoretto, *Last Supper*, 1592-1594. Oil on canvas.
San Martino, Lucca.

Figure 16:
Tintoretto, *Last Supper.* 1592-1594. Oil on canvas.
San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice.

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