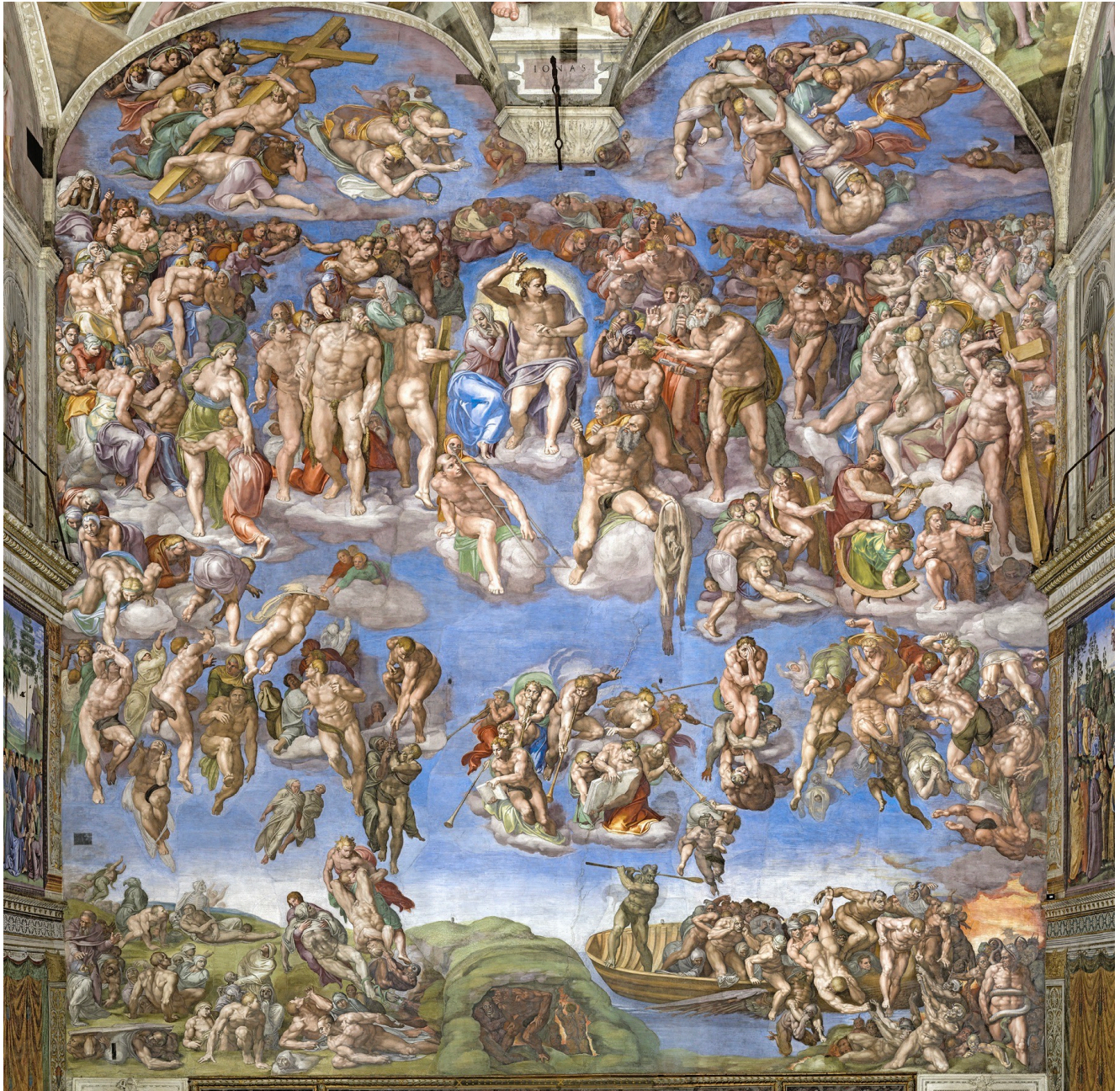


*“Mery Magdalene  
in Michelangelo’s Last Judgement”*

by Sara Penco



## *Premise*

The *Last Judgment* is like a “*discourse*” imbued with profound Christian meaning. The walls of the Sistine Chapel recount the history of Christianity, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, and the intimate relationship between humanity and the infinite God.

**Is it truly possible that in this sacred sanctuary the figure of the Apostle of the Apostles is absent, the woman whose faith in Christ was so steadfast that she became the model for attaining eternal salvation? The only woman who holds such significance that “...to summarize the entire Gospel in a single word, Jesus calls by name: Mary!”?**

Five hundred years after the creation of the fresco, **Sara Penco**—restorer and art enthusiast—**recognizes and substantiates the identification of Mary Magdalene** among the tangle of figures crowding the wall that faces the faithful, behind the altar.

The study, based on rigorously scientific premises, is published in the volume “*Mary Magdalene in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment*”, issued by Scripta Manent (edited by Asia Graziano with a preface by Professor Yvonne Dohna Schlobitten). Press review: <https://sapereproject.com/media-sapere-project/maria-maddalena-nel-giudizio-di-michelangelo>.

The *Last Judgment* does not depict the end of time, but **rather the apocalyptic contents that precede it**. This concept is essential for understanding the foundation of Michelangelo’s dual iconological program: the interpretation of the drama of the Parousia directed at sinful souls, which foreshadows the terrifying condemnation of evil; **but also the warning, the exhortation to reflect, and the call to hope for the souls** who, steadfast in the cross, will be freed from suffering. For them, the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven will open.

The artist’s profound Christian fervor fuels, and at times intensifies, the search for the most appropriate iconographic symbolism to communicate to humanity the proclamation of **salvation** and to reaffirm **God’s will to grant forgiveness and grace to His “sonship”**.

Across the centuries, the fresco seems to renew precisely the “*sentiment that focuses on the divine grace God will grant to humankind for their sincere and pure faith in the sacrifice of Christ, and not for their merits in futile earthly endeavors*”.

The presence of Mary Magdalene, prototype of the possibility of redemption and example of righteousness even for the Apostles, bears witness to the **message of hope** and assumes profound significance because «... *the warning and the redemption of sins represent the exhortation to reflect, in the awareness of the sorrowful who, more than ever in the image of Mary of Magdala, symbolize the weeping of humanity*».

Michelangelo’s evocative interpretation in expressing these Christian concepts finds its highest expression in the wrath of the **Judge**, which serves as a *warning* to humanity, but to which the artist opposes, with equal force, the clemency inherent in the first coming of Christ made man: **the Redeemer**.

The *Judgment* awaiting the damned is devastating, but the message of grace is overwhelmingly powerful!

## Unpublished interpretative key to the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel



At the far right edge of the wall that hosts the *Last Judgment*, a man supports one of the most imposing crosses in the composition and, turning in the opposite direction of the unfolding events, seems to accompany the *blonde woman dressed in yellow, shown in full figure, as she kisses the wood of the crossbeam: Mary Magdalene*.

The intimate sharing of the cross - object of desire for the saints - provides grounds to hypothesize that the powerful man may be recognized as a “reiteration” of *Christ the Judge in the Redeemer*. Their physical strength and somatic features coincide, but it is the posture of the arm that cannot be considered the casual “projection” of such a meaningful gesture; for it is precisely from the force flowing through the *Judge’s* raised arm that the whirlwind of events animating every detail of the 180.21 square meters of wall is unleashed.

The juxtaposition of Magdalene with the Redeemer, especially in the *Parousia*, would reaffirm the concept of *Resurrection* and the *clemency of Christ* announced in the biblical testimony according to which “*God’s judgment upon evil will be a judgment of grace*”: a message of love that goes far beyond the cruelty of the condemnation of the damned.



This unprecedented interpretation of the fresco conveys a powerful theological message of hope and shines a spotlight on a new aspect of the hermeneutics of the *Last Judgment*, granting - one of the most renowned and admired works in the world - an extraordinary relevance that proves strongly consistent with the “*New Season of the Church*” inaugurated by Pope Francis.