

The Trial of Veronese

by Mark Anthony Signorelli (October 2010)



In 1573, the painter Paolo Caliari (a native of Verona, and so more familiarly known as Paolo Veronese) was summoned before the Venetian office of the Inquisition. He had recently completed a depiction of the Last Supper in one of the city's basilicas, and the Inquisitors wanted to know why he had filled his picture with such seemingly irreverent figures as dwarves, dogs, and a servant with a bloody nose. Particularly suspicious were a number of figures who appeared German or Swiss, and thus were presumed to represent Protestants. Veronese addressed his interlocutors with great confidence, asserting that it was his privilege and duty as an artist to paint according to the precedence of artistic tradition – he invoked the particular authority of Michelangelo, who painted nudes on the walls of the Sistine Chapel – and the lights of his own talent. Eventually, he appeased the Inquisitors by simply changing the title of his work.