NICOLAS POUSSIN'S *THE FOUR SEASONS*

by

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ABSTRACT

Nicolas Poussin's landscapes, *The Four Seasons*, 1660-1664, have been the subject of extensive analysis because of their enigmatic character and the modulation in Poussin's style in his last years The meaning of these representations has, however, remained cryptic and, to some extent, neglected.

This thesis attempts to make a contribution toward unravelling the mystery of *The Four Seasons*. These profound works reflect Poussin's religious persuasion, knowledge of which is essential to an understanding of them. Poussin's religious convictions, however, are difficult to discern with any precision; for, although he died a Catholic, he was closely associated with the progressive thinking that influenced religious belief in the Baroque age, much of which was rejected by the Church of Rome

Nevertheless, Poussin was undoubtedly a devout Christian, inspired particularly by the early Christian Fathers and Stoics. It is in nature, above all, though, that he perceived God's presence and message which he strove to capture in his "altarpiece" to the seasons.

RÉSUMÉ

Les Quatres Saisons, 1660-1664, paysages de Nicolas Poussin, ont été beaucoup analisées en raison de leur qualité énigmatique et de la modification de son style pendant les dernières années de sa vie. La signification de ces représentations artistiques est, cependant, restée mystérieuse et, dans une certaine mesure, négligée. Cette dissertation tente d'apporter une contribution à une solution l'énigme des *Quatres Saisons*. Leur message, à mon avis, à sa source dans les croyances religieuses de Poussin, dont la connaissance est essentielle à la compréhension de ces peintures. Les croyances religieuses de Poussin sont, pourtant, difficiles à discerner précisement; car, bien qu'il soit mort catholique, il était étroitement associé aux réflexions progressistes qui ont influencé la religion à l'âge baroque, réflexions en grande partie rejetées par l'église romaine

Néamoins, Poussin était sans doute un chrétien pieux qui s'inspirait particulièrement des croyances religieuses des Pères de l'Église et des Stoiques. Surtout, ce fut dans la nature que Poussin percevait la présence et le message de Dieu qu'il s'est éfforcé de retrouver dans son "tableau d'autel" consacré aux saisons.

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QUOTE

The Lord is continually proving to us the resurrection that is to be, the first fruits of which he constituted by raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Let us look, beloved, at the resurrection: the night goes to rest, the day arises; the day departs, night comes on...the sower went forth and cast each of the seeds into the ground. These fall on the ground dry and bare, and decay. Then the greatness of the Lord's Providence raises them up from decay, and from the one many grow up and bare fruit.

Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*

PREFACE

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) has been regarded in literature, from his time to the present, as the supreme exponent of Classicism. He was upheld by l'Académie Royale of the seventeenth century as the "modern Raphael" or the "new Apelles,"[1] exemplary of a noble, rational and severe academic style. The Comte de Caylus spoke of the "beau ideal" and "grand goût" of the eighteenth century as founded in the seventeenth century by men such as Poussin The Académie of Poussin's era and of later generations attempted to give *Winter* or *The Flood* of *The Four Seasons* a rational interpretation. Diderot, who revered Poussin, described *Winter, The Flood*, as though it were an academic work.[2] Rogier de Piles as well as the later Romantics such as Turner, however, perceived the sublime in *Winter, The Flood* .[3] They identified the colourful and emotional aspects of the work as the Romantic elements. Thus, Poussin, the supreme exponent of Classicism in Western art, has a significant place in the history of Romantic painting, particularly as a result of his later landscapes The critics' image of Poussin, thus, plays a crucial role in the *colore-disegno* dispute which occupied the Académie for twenty years. Fuseli saw in Poussin's paintings an apparent dichotomy when he wrote: "(There is an) astonishing difference of effect between the works of the same man when inspired by sentiment or suggested by cold reasoning."[4]

The categorization of Poussin as a Classicist or as a Romantic is perhaps too limiting, especially when one considers Poussin's later images and the descriptions of his biographers Bellori in *Le Vite* of 1672, is more traditional in his representation of Poussin as successor to academic artists such as Annibale Carracci, though Italian in his bias, as Félibien is French in his in *Entretiens*, 1725, in his description of Poussin as the "French Raphael."[5] Both commend Poussin for his noble subjects and ideal forms, and assert that Raphael was his spiritual ancestor. Sandrart in *Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau-Bild-und Mahlerey-Kunst*, 1675, displays a more unorthodox perspective of Poussin's forerunners as being the Carravaggisti such as Valentin. Sandrart's interest lies chiefly in technique. In Passeri's biography *Le Vite*, 1673, Poussin is viewed, not within the usual context of Classical art, but as an individual temperament displaying great originality and imagination, "invenzioni cosi pellegrini...bizzarrie,"[6] and skill in the use of light and colour. Passeri's praise of Poussin's landscapes such as *The Four Seasons* was concerning such qualities Passeri also gives details about Poussin's illness, funeral, and burial"come perfetto...cattolico."[7] The general effect of Passeri's narrative is, not so much to

present the "peintre-philosophe" as the Raphael and the Apelles of the seventeenth century according to the conventional formula, but as a mortal man subject to the influence of the stars, fortune, and the cares and illnesses of human fate and of his age.

In the eighteenth century, Chateaubriand saw *The Four Seasons* as prefiguring Poussin's own imminent death,[8] and P.N. Bergeret placed *Winter, The Flood,* behind Poussin's death bed in his *Service Funèbre de Nicolas Poussin* of 1819 as a tribute and elegy to Poussin.[9] The avid poussiniste, Gault de Saint-Germain, also discerned a deeper meaning in Poussin's *The Four Seasons* : "On voit tout l'esprit du peintre, dégagé des sens, s'élançant dans l'immensité pour atteindre la vraisemblance d'une vérité inacéssible."[10]

Séroux d'Agincourt was, thus, accurate in his description of Poussin as "le peintre-philosophe" in an inscription on a monument dedicated to Poussin's achievements that was placed in the Pantheon in 1782.[11] Poussin's philosophy was, however, very personal and his illustrations were created for a literate elite. Accordingly, they did not lie within the mainstream of Counter-Reformatory art,which was produced under papal commissions for the education and conversion of the general public His paintings are, though, religious and display a certain similarity of ideas to those which adhered to the dictates of the Roman Church.

The Baroque period was the scene of intense religiosity as a result of the Counter Reformation; additionally it was a time of questioning arising out of the profound developments that were occurring in the field of science. Mysticism and Scepticism existed side by side in man's search for the Self in the external world. An intelligent and enquiring mind such as Poussin's could not help but be influenced by new discoveries in the world of thought, yet Poussin was able to remain a devout Catholic, as were most men of science and philosophy of the day. Poussin's pictures are his private response to the theological uncertainties of his generation. Like many of his contemporaries, he not only challenged his own religious beliefs but also was keen to learn about differing philosophies and significant scientific disclosures. In so doing, he was able to affirm his own religious convictions. In fact, ultimately, on his death bed, Poussin requested Absolution in the manner of a true Catholic.

Objection may be raised to the hypothesis that Poussin's The Four Seasons contain profounder meanings, for neither Chantelou, his friend and patron in Paris, nor Félibien, his biographer, make specific allusion to them in their writings. Nevertheless, absence of such confirmation is explicable as Poussin was a Stoic and part of an intellectual circle to which he did not need to clarify the deeper intentions of his art, since it was well acquainted with them. Poussin

would probably not have wished his ideas to have been recorded in a book intended for general publication. Félibien himself, for instance, remarks on Poussin's secretiveness; "He was prudent in all his actions, restrained and discreet in his words, opening his heart only to his close friends."[12] It isalso possible that Poussin was testing the perspicacity of his colleagues and patrons, who prided themselves on their superior intellectual ability, to see whether they could fully comprehend his innermost thoughts. In a famous letter to his friend Jacques Stella, Poussin concludes, "Ceux qui les sauront bien lire."[13] And in another letter he instructs Chantelou to, "Read the story and the picture."[14] His canvases are, thus, images which have to be read and interpreted, not merely to be seen for their aesthetic value. The deeper significance or secret has to be sought within a Baroque painting; such was the nature of the Baroque language of allegory, which had both a familiar intent and another concealed behind its literal meaning. Poussin's depictions are not unlike the intentions of the good poet described in Gabriele Zinano's *Il Sogno Overo della Poésia* of 1590:

> A good poem participates generally in all knowledge. The good poet teaches sometimes with open and sometimes with hidden meanings...To the former...you give the name of simple allusion: the latter is achieved by allegory, whether moral, natural, or divine.[15]

CHAPTER I: POUSSIN; BAROQUE RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY, AND SCIENCE

The Baroque age was typified by a pietism fostered by the Roman Catholic Church against a background of the Counter Reformation. Art, as stated, was deployed as a means of promoting the precepts of the Catholic Church through the education of the populace. It had to have a clear, natural and simple style in order to be comprehensible to the general public. The majority of artistic monuments of the Baroque era, particularly in Italy, were directly related to the new propagandistic stance of the Church. Bernini's colonnades for the elliptical Piazza at St Peter's in Rome, Caravaggio's realistic depictions of narrative paintings, and Rubens' numerous religious works, all exemplify, in their disparate ways, the Counter-Reformatory mentality.[1] (Fig.1)

Poussin is among the great Baroque artists - Caravaggio, Rubens and Bernini, though his representations do not lie within the mainstream of the Counter Reformatory propagandistic arts. They are, however, decidedly religious. Poussin's paintings, with one exception, were not chosen to adorn the altars of the great churches in Rome. The only public commission he was granted was an altarpiece for St Peter's representing the *Martyrdom of St Erasmus*. He did not receive universal acclaim for this work and never executed a public altarpiece in Rome again. As an indirect result, he developed into one of the most individual and independent of the great Catholic artists, possessing a very personal expression. His paintings were not ordered for or subject to public approval but, rather, were produced in accord with his own private taste. In this respect, he was not unlike Rembrandt. His pictures were not the usual "Bible of the illiterate"[2] intended to educate and to convince the public. Rather, they were commissioned and painted for a very literate elite of understanding amateurs. The image that emerges is that of a grave, deliberate, and serious artist, living apart from public life, and contemplating it with detachment. This is far from the portraits of Rubens and Bernini, who were heavily involved in both political and religious affairs of the Church.

Before deciphering Poussin's beliefs hidden in *The Four Seasons*, it is important to view seventeenth-century thought in general. In dealing with religion in the Baroque times, it is paramount to note that the dichotomy that existed was not only the one between pro-religious and anti-religious forces, nor solely Catholic verses Protestant, but also that represented by schismatic sects which broke away from the Catholic Church and established their independence. The orders which emerged as a result of these religious conflicts were, among others, the Jesuits

and the Jansenists.[3] Their common purpose was the search for identity within the new changing world and a return to truth in faith. It was a generation which united, what we today consider to be opposing forces, Mysticism and Scepticism. The spirit was one of power - spiritual, secular, scientific, political and psychological - all varied expressions of a common view of man and his world. The achievements of man lay in might and the realization of its limitations in the face of an infinite world, created by a remote and all-powerful being transcending all human comprehension The drama of man in the universe was disclosed through the effective utilisation of allegory and metaphor.

In 1610 when the Counter Reformation was at its height, doubt and uncertainty were rife concerning matters relating to the government of the Italian Roman Church, and to doctrinal issues, such as the Holy Communion, pre-destination and the Immaculate Conception. During this era, one of the prominent orders within the Roman Catholic Church was the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, whose founding father was St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), noted for his *Spiritual Exercises.* The Jesuits stressed the renewal of the Church of Rome and the universal order of Christianity They were adopted by the Orthodox Church as leaders of the Counter Reformation movement, assuming a salient position in the defence and revival of Catholicism The Jesuits declared the personal leadership of Christ and the vital role of the Pope, the ruler in the secular realm. They were supportive of the general trend of Humanism, Classicism and Paganism in the arts, their goal being to unite all forms of art under the Church. In Il Gesù, the Jesuit church in Rome, the marriage of Christian and Pagan within the Roman Church is symbolized.[4]

The Jesuits principally represented an Italian movement. It was, not surprisingly, in France that the Jesuits encountered their toughest opposition, the Jansenists. Jansenism was a Roman Catholic Reform movement founded by Cornelius Otto Jansen, Bishop of Ypres (1585-1638). The Jansenists reappraised the piety present in the existing Church. Emphasis was placed on pre-destination and Grace, and on the scholarly reading of the Bible. Man from birth was seen as inheriting the sin of Adam, his ancestor. His salvation was to be attained through the Grace of Christ. Only an elite was considered worthy of the heavenly realm. The easy Absolution practised by the Jesuits was despised. There was a general puritanism and pessimism in the Jansenist beliefs, as they promoted pre-destination, in contrast to the free will of the Jesuits. The Jansenists were also opposed to ritual and the ceremonies of the Church. Cornelius Jansen in writing the *Augustinus*, published posthumously in 1640 did not, however, intend to rebel against the Catholic Church Rather, he still considered himself to be a part of the Church, as the Epilogue to his book indicates "I leave my work to the judgement of the Roman Church ..I retract all that she will decide that I ought to (must) retract."[5] The *Augustinus* attained great popularity,

but was labelled heretical by Pope Urban VIII as early as 1642. The Jansenist movement was further disapproved of by the French leaders - Cardinal Richelieu and his advisers - as well as by King Louis XIV.[6]

Jansenist teachings were inspired by St Augustine (354-430) and the early Church Fathers in general. As such, Jansenism was part of rationalism in French Classical thought and religion of the time influencing Cartesian metaphysics and scientists such as Descartes and Pascal. St Augustine and St Ambrose were in turn influenced by Stoicism. Virtue was stressed as the highest good , "A blessed life is the fruit of the present, and eternal life the hope of the future."[7] The "Kingdom of God" of St John's Gospel was the celestial life of the soul of the Stoic, attained through virtue. To St Augustine, Stoicism, and the Gospel of John, the purpose of man's existence was to prepare the soul on earth for intellectual fruition in heaven. St Augustine suggested, "To possess something eternal by knowing it,"[8] while John 17:3 stated, "This is eternal life, that they might know thee." Heaven, according to the Stoics, was attained by an elite who understood the process of intellectual illumination. St Augustine's body of teaching was at once philosophically conceived and characteristically Christian in appearance St Augustine was to influence Aquinas in the union of faith and reason. Centuries later, Montaigne was to characterize a way of life and philosophy similar to that of Augustine's resulting in a "Christian Stoicism."[9] The revival of Stoicism in the seventeenth century is also attributable to the Jesuits who published the *Seneca Christianius*. Seneca was to them the pillar of virtue, wisdom, sublime contemplation, purity, freedom of spirit, and tranquility of soul. Christian connotations were read into Seneca's philosophy in the post antique world, and in the seventeenth century Herbert of Cerbury developed the idea, begun by Christian Humanists of the previous century, of religious peace and the reduction of opposing religious principles to common elements, all under the direction of Stoicism. Poussin, as a Stoic, was influenced by comparative religion and associated with men who had similar interests such as Cassiano dal Pozzo, Giambattista Manno and Tommaso Campanella.

As a result of the religious ferment between Protestants and Catholics, and within the different factions of the Catholic Church, there was a growth of both Deism and Atheism. Mysticism was developed by Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696) in Spain. He was opposed to authority, particularly that of the Roman Catholic Church, as indicated in his *Guida Spirituale* of 1675 As a result, he was labelled a heretic by the Inquisition and imprisoned for life.

The French movement equivalent to this Spanish form of Mysticism similarly upheld pure contemplation over and above the truths of the Gospel. Vincent de Paul (1580-1660) and

Francis de Sales (1567-1627), both devout Catholics, searched for deeper Catholic piety and charity than that exercised by the Jesuits and the Papal Court. Christianity had to reach beyond Christian institutions such as the Papacy. The luxury of the Papacy was a point of serious criticism and a simple life was advocated. Francis de Sales expressed such sentiments in his *Treatise on the Love of God* and in his *Introduction to the Devout Life.* The Mystics were the counterparts, in the spiritual sense, of such eminent temporal authorities as Richelieu, the Popes and Louis XIV.[10] Poussin, like these pious men, also led a frugal life, which is attested to in his comment to Cardinal Camillo Massimi, who pitied Poussin for having no servant, to which Poussin replied "I pity your Eminence for having so many."[11]

The French rational thought of the Jansenists, influenced by St Augustine, would have further inspired Poussin. They were also critical of the excesses in which the Papacy indulged. The Jansenist philosophy of predestination is significant too. One of the few extant religious citations by Poussin is indicative of his resignation before the inevitability of fate: "La fragilité de la fortune des hommes a toujours besoin de puissants et gaillards estançans " (Psalm146.3)[12] And in another letter he states: "Il se faut conformer à la volonté de Dieu qui ordonne ainsi les choses, et la nécéssité veut qu'elles se passent ainsi."[13] As a Frenchman, Poussin would have followed French thought, at least to some extent, particularly as the French Roman Church did not follow the dictates of Rome.

The seventeenth century, thus, was the scene of an intense and varied spiritual life It is not surprising that such an atmosphere of confusion gave rise to both extreme devotion and reservation The Dutch Sceptic Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) published *De Veritae Religionis Christianae* in1627 acquiring instant success in Europe. He suggested that all Christian churches might be reconciled under a common basis of piety, minimizing doctrinal differences. The main object was to display the truth of the Gospel, which was independent of any sectional beliefs. He sought an ethical common ground for Christian teachings. Grotius was incarcerated in Holland for such conclusions, but escaped to Paris where he was welcomed by Louis XIII. Though a Calvinist and a Sceptic, he was in close contact with both Protestant theologians and Catholic priests. The Sceptic Bayle summarized the general feeling: "Who can doubt that the Church is sometimes more, sometimes less enlightened and that in this diversity of illumination and knowledge, it may quite legitimately have different opinions on the same lights."[14]

Poussin encountered such uncertain attitudes towards the Catholic Church not only through writers such as Grotius but also through his connections with the *Libertins* circle in Paris Consequently, he made negative references to the Roman Catholic Church Poussin expressed

anti-clerical sentiments on account of the venal repute of the Papal Court and he was dissenting in his comments to Chantelou on the miraculous events of the Holy Year of March 8, 1650:

> Il ne se passe içi rien de nouveau plus remarkable que les miracles qui se font si fréquement que c'est merveille. La procession de Florence y a apporté un crucifix de bois de co...à qui la barbe est venue, et les cheveux lui croissent tous les jours de plus de quatre doigts. L'on dit que le pape le tondra l'un de ces jours en cérémonie.[15]

Poussin was contemptuous of the superstitions of his time and was especially non supportive of Church government as is evidenced in his letter concerning Urban VIII's illness addressed to Chantelou on April 18, 1644: "L'on dit içi que Sa Sainteté ne se porte pas bien. S'il nous manque, Dieu nous donne mieux...Dieu veille que nous soyons mieux gouvernés à l'avenir que par le passé."[16] In a comment to Chantelou on one of his *Sacraments*, *The Extreme Unction*, Poussin's position though humourously clever seems quite sceptical:

> Je me console en quelque manière de ce que vous recevrez l'Extrême Onction sans être malade, et, devant que j'aie entendu les plaintes que vous commensiez à faire de ne pas recevoir ce Sacrement du temps que je vous l'avais promis. Vous le recevrez non pas d'un prêtre mais du messager de Lion.[17]

This attitude does not imply that he was doubtful of the basic Christian doctrines. Througn his paintings we will perceive that he was a devout Catholic. However, whereas according to Chantelou Bernini was constantly counselled by the Jesuits and Oratorians, Poussin's attitude was far more personal. It would appear that Poussin's faith lay deeply hidden in the fundamentals of Christianity.

The Roman Catholic Church not only experienced opposition emanating from religious controversies, it also suffered from the even greater repercussions of the scientific and intellectual revolutions. The Church, however, continued to be dominated by scholastic thought. While factual truth challenged faith, religion was not deemed to be detaching mankind from life. On the contrary, religion and science were conceived of as being closely interrelated as pointed out by Gerald R. Cragg:

> (Religion) it illuminates our sense, because it alone can unfold the full mystery of nature. It answers the questions which reason can only raise, and it brings us to that fulfilment of life It cannot be set in opposition to reason or science, because it includes yet transcends both.[18]

A Baroque predilection was biblical citation and one of the most frequently uttered quotes was: "But you have ordered everything according to measure, number and weight." (Wisdom of Solomon 11:21) The relevance of this passage, which characterizes the quantitative analysis of phenomena, is that it closely linked religion to science. Moreover, measures taken to instil scientific insight were believed to be undertaken, "For the greater glory of God."[19] The mathematical and cosmological speculations of Galileo, Kepler and Descartes were undoubtedly foundations for the new-world view of Newton and Leibnitz. All three, however, declared the superiority of religion, while harbouring doubts regarding theology, at least of the existence of a personal god, until Spinoza claimed God and nature to be one.

The "new science" or "new philosophy," as it was called, was described by John Donne (1572-1631), a prominent poet and Anglican priest of the time, as "Calling all into doubt."[20] The uncertainty expressed by him is indicative of the general insecurity of the age. Nonetheless, John Donne was able to adapt religious ideas to a Copernican universe:

> Methinks the new astronomy is thus applicable...that we which are a little earth should rather move towards God, than that He which is fulfilling, and can come no wither, should move towards us [21]

Medieval "natural philosophy" had been restricted to definition and classification. A hierarchical order was given to the heavenly spheres, and the latter were reflected in the order of the earth. The conviction was that the world lay at the centre of the universe; but as the world lost its old established order, in the wake of new discoveries in science, fear and doubt resulted Man was evicted from his central position as were the angels from their fixed heaven In these circumstances, men of science were placed in a precarious position as regards the philosophy of the Church. The Holy See was reluctant to accept such crucial changes in thought, as they contradicted some of the teachings of the Church. Scientists were urged by the Church to refrain from questioning theology. The great accession of scientific data and the revolutionary transformation in interpreting it had, however, a fundamental impact on ecclesiastical philosophy. This point was especially true of the seventeenth century when there was no formal division between natural science and philosophy: the term "natural philosophy" embraced the two, changes in physics were reflected in metaphysics.

During the seventeenth century, the idea of a heliocentric universe, proposed by Copernicus, a cleric at Frauenburg, in his 1543 book De Revolutionibus, gained impetus The

hypothesis, that the sun was at the centre of the universe, and that the earth was but one of the planets subject to change, meant that man was but an integral part of a vast, boundless cosmos. Copernicus was the first to touch on the limitlessness of the universe through his calculations of the dimensions of the planetary path and the distance between planets. It was with Giordano Bruno (1548 1600), an Italian Renaissance philosopher, astronomer and mathematician, and the later Baroque scientists such as Galileo and Kepler, that the infinity of the universe was established as fact. Cosmology, morality and theology which had all been interwoven in the past, were now questioned Copernicus' concepts undermined and eventually destroyed a whole integrated fabric of thought. Man began to question his role in the universe, man as the image of God, the Fall, salvation, evil, and eternal life. How could these biblical concepts be explained if the earth was but one of countless planets?

Copernicus was able to harmonise Christianity with scientific thought, as did the seventeenth-century scientists and philosophers. In a letter to Pope Paul III, Copernicus asserted that, "Science will inspire to virtue and will fill humanity with still greater admiration for the creator of the perfect order of the universe "[22] A complete transformation in man's understanding of his relation to God and the universe was required. This did not imply an anti-religious attitude, but rather, an innovative way of looking at life and religion.

However, both the Catholic Church and its Protestant adversaries were extremely antagonistic towards Copernicus' revolutionary proposals. A trite anti Copernican statement made by the Church was: "The view that the sun stands motionless at the centre of the universe is foolish, philosophically false, and ultimately heretical, because it is contrary to Holy Scripture "[23] In 1616 *De Revolutionibus* was placed on the Catholic Church's *Index Liborum Prohibitorum.* Supporters of Copernicus such as Giordano Bruno, Galileo, and Tommaso Campanella, admired and sustained by Poussin's circle in France and in Italy, were interrogated by the Inquisition. It is not surprising, therefore, that Poussin refrained from divulging such opinions in his letters. His introduction to science was through Cassiano dal Pozzo, his friend and patron in Italy, who was in close contact with the *Libertins* in Paris and with Galileo, as is addressed in Chapter II. Through the *Libertins* Poussin was introduced to medical men, philosophers and Sceptics. It is unlikely however, that Poussin was a pure Sceptic. His attitude was reflective of the times, an age of doubt and questioning in general.

The Copernican system was, as indicated earlier, established as a fact by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) with the refinement of the telescope, invented in 1608. Galileo depended upon experimentation and calculation to explain observed data. It was because of writings such as his

Letters on Solar Spots of 1613 that Galileo was condemned as a heretic by the Inquisition and forced to deny his conviction that the earth revolved around the sun. He was protected by Poussin's circle in Italy including Cassiano dal Pozzo and Tommaso Campanella, both of whom held him in the highest esteem. In 1630, he rebelled and wrote the *Dialogues concerning the two largest systems of the world* In 1638, there followed *Dialogues concerning the New Science* Galileo criticized Medieval science for its avoidance of fact, and the *Bestiaries* for their adherence to biblical rather than natural history.[24]

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was the other Baroque scientist to support the Copernican system To him, the mathematical rationality of the universe was an article of deep and abiding faith. His devotion to the aliveness and relatedness of all things in the universe rested in astrology and the foundation of astronomical results. Kepler, mystic and scientist, saw God (the Sun) as the prime mover to whom the soul listened. This he described in *Mysterium Graphicum* of 1596 as well as in *De Harmoni Mondi* of 1619. Kepler united God with a Copernican universe, for as he expressed: "God provides for every animal his means of subsistence. For astronomers he has provided astrology."[25]

René Descartes (1596-1650) asserted the importance of analysis as opposed to hypothesis Analytic geometry was dynamic, unlike the static mathematics practised by the Greeks. Reason and the power of the mind were upheld in his *Selections* of 1627 Descartes ended his treatise with his insistence on a sincere attachment to the Catholic Church, claiming that all his opinions were "submitted to the authority of the Church."[26] Descartes saw consciousness (the mind) through science, as a source for the discovery of truth (God) He, too, however, was among those condemned by the Church for upholding principles that did not strictly conform to Church doctrine.

Blaise Pascal (1622-1662) was antagonistic towards Descartes' rationalism Experience was for him more vital than reason as a principle of physics. In his *Pensées*, he described a spiritual, emotional *erlebnis* of God, with no need for proof of his existence. The mysticism of Pascal had certain affinities with Jansenism, as did the worldly rationalism of Descartes with the Jesuits. The Stoicism of Montaigne further impressed Pascal, though he was not a Sceptic of the Renaissance, but a true child of the new religiosity, not unlike the Mystics of the seventeenth century. In 1660, however, his views were disapproved of by Louis XIV[27]

The seventeenth-century tendency to explore man's position in the universe through the means of science and religion, nurtured the development of Pantheism. This involved the idea of

an all-embracing, all-inclusive God, ("pan" meaning "all" in Greek). He was identified with the cosmos and life process. Indeed, the universe as a whole was God and God was the universe. God was eternal, absolute, cause, activity and creator. The world had a place in ultimate reality, and man's fate was an integral part of that world. Newton was to see God as fully active in the universe: "[God] who being in all places is...[able] by his will to move the Bodies within this boundless uniform Sensorium and thereby to form and reform the Parts of the universe."[28]

A form of pantheism existed in Greek times with the nature deities. Several Greek philosophers such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics contributed to Western Pantheism. To Heraclitus, true insight into the Self was attained through consciousness of the cosmos. In Stoicism, the analogy of God with nature, helped man to understand his fate in a universal system: the microcosm of man, within the macrocosm of nature. Heraclitus saw the cosmos as a pattern of physical change which accorded with the progress of time: "The year contains within itself, beginning and end."[29] The perception of a rationally structured universe implied a cosmic god and the cosmic principle of the boundless, eternal, unaging and divine. This was seen in mortal man who was immortal, for he participated in the eternal life cycle The structure of life and death was a deity in itself. The Roman Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Seneca saw the sublime (God) in nature. For as Seneca observed "God...is the all-embracing world, the ruler of the universe...builder of the cosmos."[30]

Stoicism was to influence the early Church Fathers. St Paul displayed Stoic tendencies in his reference to "nature" in 1 Corinthians 11:14. He revealed man's natural belief in God. St Augustine and St Ambrose adapted pagan literature to Christianity. In the sixteenth century, Justus Lipsius characterized Stoicism as the Christian philosophy of man. Pierre Charron and Montaigne both spoke of Stoic wisdom in connection with God. Stoicism had in fact played a prominent role in the theological formulation of Christian thought and the actual realization of Christian ideals Through the "Libertins" Poussin was introduced to such Stoic\Christian ideas, though he identified himself more closely with the earlier generation of "Christian Stoics" such as Charron and Montaigne.

The Baroque age itself witnessed the revival of a Renaissance Humanism, the wedding of Christian thought and ancient philosophy. Francois Rabelais (1483-1553), the sixteenth-century Humanist who revived the learning of the Greek Fathers of the Church including Origen and Clement of Alexandria, was widely read in the seventeenth century and influenced poets such as Giambattista Marino (1569-1625), a member of Poussin's circle. Marino's writings gained fame with the publication of his poem *Adonis* in Turin in 1623 in which he drew parallels between Christ

and Adonis. Poussin executed six watercolours for this poem that was translated into French in 1662, as was Ovid. Marino's writings were on the papal *Index*.. Rabelais, also frequently read in the seventeenth century by men such as Poussin, related, in his fourth book, a story by Plutarch which displayed the affinity of Pan with Christ and the universe, equating the symbol of Pan "all" with the cosmos, and Pan the "great shepherd" with that of Christ the "good shepherd"

> The great Saviour of the faithful, who was shamefully put to death at Jerusalem...he may lawfully be said in the Greek tongue to be Pan, since he is our all... the most mighty Pan, our only Saviour died near Jerusalem, during the reign of Tiberius Caesar.[31]

The pious religious thought of Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), who perceived that divine life extended beyond absoluteness, fell within this concept of Pantheism. For Böhme, the world was a reflection of the divine. He formulated his vision in Aurora of 1612 in which God was endless, the source of divine light. Man was spirit, body and soul and had to be reborn before truly understanding God.[32]

It was in the seventeenth century that the Jewish rationalist Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) formulated the most thoroughly pantheistic system. Spinoza insisted that there could, by definition, be only one unlimited substance possessing an infinitude of attributes God was eternal. Spinoza advocated an intellectual love and understanding of God, as had the Stoics and the early Fathers: "All things are in God...without Him they could neither exist nor be conceived, and all things were predetermined by God...through his free or good will but through his absolute nature or infinite power."[33] The pantheistic approach, whether rational in character as conceived by Spinoza, or mystic as with Bohme, was rejected by contemporary Orthodox Christian theologians, as were the discoveries of the scientists, for they all deviated from the established teachings of the Church.

Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), a Dominican monk, Platonic philosopher and writer, who was acquainted with Poussin, similarly promoted a cosmic god who was external and transcendental. Campanella saw the pagan gods as manifestations of the elements and cycles of nature. He further attempted to fuse Renaissance Humanism and Roman Catholic theology His views not only accorded with Marino and Macrobius, but with the philosophy of Giordano Bruno and Pantheism and even with the thoughts of the early Christian Fathers and Stoics. All of these ideas were of great interest to Pozzo's circle, to the Barberini, and later to Cardinal Massimi, Poussin's friend and patron in old age Poussin frequently explored the fusion of pagan

mythology and the cyclical aspects of nature with Christianity, manifested in his earlier paintings such as the *Echo and Narcissus* of 162" and later in *The Four Seasons* of 1660-64. Campanella's opposition to the scholastic Aristotelianism of the Church led to his conviction as a heretic and his subsequent imprisonment. Campanella wrote in defence of Galileo, also accused of heresy, in his *Apologia pro Galileo* of 1616. He was also against the way in which the Church was governed. He, nonetheless, reverted to Catholicism while in prison, writing *La Citta del Sole*. In this book Campanella characterized the "spiritus" (God) as the sun, the life-force: "The sun is all sense and gives life to all."[34]

The new interest in nature, was spurred on by discoveries in science and by explorations of the globe. The development of landscape painting, in which man played only a limited, sometimes minute role, may be linked to this popularized awareness of the human condition. The passionate concern of the epoch with nature and its secrets, the persistent doubting of all human authority, was fed by, what is to us today, a faith of extraordinary depth and intensity. It was a belief in the power of God to structure the universe, and a corresponding confidence in man to understand that order, and to organize anew man's life on earth.

Religion during the seventeenth century, could no longer be explained solely in terms of devotion and acceptance. Faith was re-examined by men of learning, who were fully cognizant of ancient philosophy and of new scientific advancement in order to explain some of the crucial questions of the age. The Church felt threatened by the aforementioned deviations from Orthodoxy which increased between 1610 and 1660, and attempted to silence what it considered to be impious voices. However, Baroque Mysticism, Rationalism, Stoicism and Pantheism were all logical projections of elements of an older Christian Orthodoxy, Catholic and Reformed. Mysticism and Scepticism, Paganism and Christianity, were the subject of careful and persistent analytical and comparative research in the constant quest for religious truth. One article of faith was not, for the most part, questioned, namely, the existence of God. This belief was echoed by Descartes when he wrote, "The supreme truth is that God exists."[35]

It is against this background that Poussin's *The Four Seasons* must be viewed, as must all his paintings. But before analyzing *The Four Seasons* it is important to see how Poussin's beliefs is revealed in his paintings, and to consider the impact his association with groups, such as the *Libertins*, and individuals, like Cassiano dal Pozzo or Tommaso Campanella, had on his art and beliefs. This, then, is the subject of Chapter II.

CHAPTER II: POUSSIN'S RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS AND PATRONS

Poussin rarely mentioned his personal religious beliefs in his correspondence.[1] According to Félibien and Poussin himself, the artist's faith remained undisclosed, hidden in his canvases, unless the viewer knew how to interpret them. This was partly a result of Poussin's secrecy concerning his art and thoughts, with the exception of his close circle of friends. Thus, it is to his paintings that we must turn in order to understand him and his religious persuasions further. But, as Poussin himself indicated, we have to decipher and comprehend his works in the search for his deeper intent. Bernini was quite astute in his comment on one of Poussin's representations. As recorded by Chantelou, Bernini apparently exclaimed, "M. Poussin est un peintre qui travaille de là."[2] pointing to his forehead, while Bellori referred to Poussin's wealth of knowledge in the following manner:

> Men of intelligence came to hear from his mouth the finest reflections on painting...As he had read and observed much, no topic arose in the coversation which he had not mastered, and his words and ideas were so just and so well ordered that they seemed rather thought out than made spontaneously. The cause of this was his fine mind and his wide reading...He was penetrating in understanding and discreet in choice.[3]

Poussin filtered his vast knowledge into his paintings. He did not adopt the popular Catholic imagery of the age which was exuberant, colourful, [illegible]iral, didactic and intended for the general public. He turned, instead, to a simpler, more enigmatic form, created for a small circle of knowledgeable recipients. Poussin never enjoyed the courtly and papal ties and favours of his contemporaries Bernini and Rubens, having little to offer the dazzling courts of Urban VIII (1623-1644) in Italy or of Louis XIII\IV in France, due to his sober and restrained manner.[4] Poussin, moreover, never depicted the Papacy of his day. He chose,instead, to illustrate the early Fathers and ascetics such as St Jerome and St Francis.(Fig.7a) with whom he felt a greater affinity.

Poussin's religious paintings such as those of the two *Sacraments* series, executed in 1632-42 for Cassiano dal Pozzo and in 1644-48 for Paul Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou, concentrate on the theme of salvation.[5] In several other paintings the subjects were the Old Testament scenes of Moses in which he foresaw the introduction of the Christian sacraments, especially Baptism. Emphasis is, therefore, on salvation through the Sacraments such as Baptism and the

Eucharist, subjects which line the walls of the catacombs. The influence of Jansenism could be an explanation for this consideration in his earlier themes as the Jansenists drew particular inspiration from the early Church Fathers. However, such a focus was also quite typical of Catholic books of the Counter Reformation such as Césare Baronio's *Ainnales Ecclesiastics* (1588-1607) and Antonio Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea* of 1650. The Sacraments were the subject of long and heated debate in the seventeenth century and the comparison of Christianity with pagan beliefs was a typical Counter-Reformatory revivalistic device.

Poussin's knowledge of Old Testament and New Testament parallels, as illustrated in two widely read Medieval books in the seventeenth century, the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, was extensive. The religious ideas he expressed were similar to those of the early Fathers - Tertullian, St Ambrose, St Augustine and St Gregory of Nyssa. His choice of New Testament subjects was similar to his Old Testament themes. Once again Baptism and the Sacraments were introduced into his representations. In his *Crucifixion* of1645-1646 in the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, water and blood issue forth, which were common symbols of salvation by Baptism in the early Church.[6] The subjects that Poussin chose to illustrate, though commonplace in the seventeenth century, are adopted from Medieval art. Poussin's renditions are, thus, similar in subject to those of Bernini or Rubens, though they are treated in a very individual way.

The circle of friends and adherents surrounding Poussin and Cassiano dal Pozzo were removed from the emotional, ecstatic Catholicism of Roman Baroque. Their interests lay in comparative religion, as expressed by Plutarch, Rabelais, Marino and Campanella, and the writings of the early Apologists and Stoics. This is visualized in the comparison made between the Christian Sacraments and the mysteries of the ancient Greek religion in the *Ordination* (Fig.2a) of the second set of Sacraments of 1647. In this work the letter E, inscribed on a pillar, symbolizes at once both the Christian Church, Ecclesia, and the Sanctuary of the mysteries at Delphi. The letter E meaning "thou art" is therefore, directed to both Apollo and Christ.[7] In another picture, *The Exposition of Moses* (Fig.2b) of 1654, Poussin includes Pan pipes in a tree within a Christian, Old Testament scene. Furthermore, the child within the basket represents Moses, Bacchus, Pan and Christ. The comment of the collector, Coménie de Brienne, who was acquainted with Poussin, is here appropriate "It is Moses, the Mosche of the Hebrews, the Pan of the Arcadians, the Priapus of Hellespont, the Anubis of the Egyptians."[8]

Poussin's *Sacraments* repeat a basic truth of all religions; the idea of religion as above sect or creed This was an opinion that was common to his friends in France, including Abbé

Bourdelot, and to Baroque philosophers and Sceptics in general, such as Grotius who felt that after the early Fathers, the Church had left the true path of theology.

Poussin's paintings are timeless and mysterious. They do not consist of an actual incident in time, but of an eternal thought and symbol. The attire of his figures even conforms to that of the early Church. Baptism, the Eucharist, death and rebirth, are all crucial to his works Poussin's allusive, erudite, abstract conceptions blend literature and theology and alude to the principles of the early Christian Apologists.

These interpretations are not exclusive to Poussin's paintings with a strictly religious subject, but, are applicable to such early mythological scenes as *Echo and Narcissus* (Fig.3a) of 1627 in the Louvre. The analogy of Narcissus with Christ is clear. Narcissus symbolized divine love, sacrifice, and eternal life. He died because of self-love; he was, symbolically, the world. Thus, in loving himself, he loved the world. Christ was also the divine lover of the earth, for which He sacrificed Himself. The semblance between Narcissus and Christ is taken further. Poussin's painting adopts for the Narcissus figure the pose of a *Pietà* by Bordone, which was in the Ducal Palace in Venice during Poussin's visit from 1623-24 (Fig.3b).[5] Furthermore, the light beyond the cave reveals Apollo the sun god, Christ the Light of the world, and the dawn. Both Bordone's *Pietà* and Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* convey a solemn mood appropriate to their message - the fatality of a sacred god and the salvation of man with Christ's resurrection in Spring. The imitation of a religious *Pietà* for a mythological painting of *Echo and Narcissus* would have been of great interest to Poussin who often drew parallels between Christianity and Paganism in his paitings, as the early Christians and Stoics had done in their writings

Comparative religion played a prominent role in another of Poussin's early paintings, *Venus with the Dead Adonis* (Fig.4a) of 1627 in Caen. Adonis, as a vegetative god, typified the cycles of nature, as he spent one third of the year underground with Demeter, and one third of the year with the Spring goddess Venus. With his departure the earth became barren as described in the Bible (Gen.11:3):

> Nature that made these with herself at strife,
> saith that the world hath ending with thy life.

New life was promised with His resurrection. The similarities to Christ's life and death abound These affinities persist when *Venus and the Dead Adonis* is compared with Poussin's religious representation, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* of the same date, 1627 in Munich (Fig 3b)

Formally, the bodies of Christ and Adonis appear to mirror each other. Moreover, the two putti of *The Lamentation* are also repeated in *Venus with the Dead Adonis.* The positions of Mary in *The Lamentation* and Venus in *Venus with the Dead Adonis* display further correspondances. More important to the comprehension of these images is the similitude of The Lamentation and *Venus with the Dead Adonis* on an emblematic level. In this ethereal world of poetry, the air is one of religious ritual. The sacrifice of a great god, through the shedding of blood, is the subject of both representations. Water, wine and grain, the Eucharistic elements, are alluded to as the means of salvation and nourishment for the soul.

The cult of Adonis is described in Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*, which was widely read in the seventeenth century, particularly in certain circles such as Poussin's, since Marino had published his poem *Adonis* in Turin in 1623, which drew parallels between Christ and Adonis.[10] Furthermore, an engraving of *The Death of Adonis* in the French translation of Ovid, published in 1662, showed the composition to be very similar to that of a Pietà.

Poussin's early mythological works frequently depict the metamorphosis of humans into flowers. Floral metamorphoses lend themselves readily to the allegory of the death and resurrection of Christ. Poussin's painting *The Realm of Flora* of 1636 (Fig.5) portrays such ideas. Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* described the death of the heroes as the sleep of earthly life preceding spiritual rebirth. Dying gods came to symbolize the cyclical process of nature - life, death and rebirth. Euripides claimed that the mortal god patiently submitted to his martyrdom for the deliverance of mankind.[11] Similarly, the Christian Jesus is God Incarnate, Who died for all humanity.

The Realm of Flora was originally to have been part of a series with the two other intended works, *Perseus and Andromeda* and *Venus and Adonis Hunting*, which did not progress beyond the drawings today in the Royal Library at Windsor. In *Perseus and Andromeda* the Medusa's blood is shed turning into coral, and in *Venus and Adonis* Venus' blood colours the rose red, and in *The Realm of Flora*, the heroes' blood is transformed into flowers. Blood is the principle source of life for the soul.[12] In these floral metamorphoses nature is celebrated as a regenerative force, which implies salvation through Christ.

It was through Poussin's great friend and patron, Cassiano dal Pozzo, one of the most cultivated and learned of Italian art patrons, and adviser to Cardinal Barberini, that the artist's ideas were given impetus. Pozzo's associates both in Italy and in France, together with the fine libraries

available to Poussin, which included Pozzo's Library and *Paper Museum* on Via Chiavari and the Barberini Library, were all important in helping the artists to achieve his goals.

Cassiano dal Pozzo collected ancient sculptures as well as the writings of the early Christian Fathers, the Stoics such as Macrobius, Seneca and Cicero,[13] Ovid, Giordano Bruno, plus contemporaries such as Giambattista Marino, Tommaso Campanella, and Galileo. Pozzo displayed a sustained curiosity for the rituals, practices, ceremonies and beliefs of the early Christians. These interests in ancient philosophy, religion, science and nature, undoubtedly influenced Poussin in his painting, particularly with the works he executed for Pozzo. His library also contained literature on the natural sciences. In addition Pozzo collected rare living birds and plants, and some skeletons. Pozzo's *Paper Museum* or *Museum Chartaceum* comprised sets of drawings of antique friezes, vases, Palestrina mosaics, sacrifices and rituals; as well as of nature - birds, plants, anatomy and geology.[14] This Library and *Paper Museum* constituted, in effect, a center for study and research, one of the first of its kind in Europe. It not only was a source of information for scholars from across the Continent but remains valuable for today's scholar.

Pozzo and his close friends were keenly interested in gardening and particularly in the cultivation of fruits, plants and flowers. This was their main preoccupation when they stayed at their villa near Nervi. Their botanical and geological drawings are both extensive and scientifically accurate. At the same time, wedded to these pursuits of the real world, they engaged in more abstract pleasures such as philosophy, mythology and intellectual games. For instance, beside one of the botanical drawings of a hyacinth, Ovid is quoted from *Metamorphoses* 10.14: "You are immortal; as often as Spring drives Winter out and the ram succeeds the watery fish, so often do you come up and blossom on the green turf."[15]

As mentioned, Cassiano dal Pozzo was a prominent figure in the Barberini entourage and it was under the aegis of Barberini that Poussin came into his own. Such a contact with an eminent member of the Church is not, however, proof of either Poussin's or, for that matter, Pozzo's Orthodoxy. On the contrary, Pozzo, like Poussin, held opinions that were independent and that were not wholly in agreement with the views of temporal Roman Catholic Church leaders. He did not appreciate the flamboyant style of the Barberini; rather, he stressed a severe and controlled manner, though not one without passion. The sacrifices, bacchanals, and landscapes executed for Cassiano dal Pozzo, had deeper implications. Unlike most Counter-Reformation art, Poussin's work was not didactic, but rather, esoteric. The cryptic quality of his paintings was in part a result of Poussin's Stoic leanings which stressed that inner thoughts were not to be disclosed In his *Self-Portrait* (Fig.6) of1650 in the Louvre, Poussin shows himself to be a Stoic, actually

living according to reason: "Comme la nature et la raison enseignent à les faire."[16] He was resigned in the face of death and misfortune: "Il se faut conformé à la volonté de Dieu."[17] He even applied his Stoic philosophy to the practical manner in which he conducted his life, living simply and modestly.

The possibility of Pozzo's links with Jansenism, should not be discounted. It has also been suggested that he was connected with other groups which were opposed to the established Church, such as the *Libertins* in France whose members included Jean Jacques Bourdelot and Gabriel Naudé who had visited Italy in 1634-38.[18] Pozzo was in close correspondence with these men and it was to Pozzo that Jean Jacques Bourdelot left his library, antiques and private papers, which were dangerously compromising.[19] Poussin was associated with the *Libertins* in Paris when he executed the decorations for the Long Gallery of the Louvre.

Pozzo may also have had affinities with the Calvinist Paganino Gaudenzi, since in 1647 he requested that this staunch enemy of the Jesuits send his likeness so that it could be included in his collection of portraits of learned men.[20]

One of Pozzo's passions was scientific investigation. Galileo was a close friend, his portrait being included among those collected of other esteemed men mentioned above. In1622, Pozzo was admitted to the *Academia dei Lincei*, which stressed the systematic organization of scientific thought and experiment. Galileo was a member of this institution, from which the clergy was excluded, though its patronage was not. The aims of the *Academia* were: "To spread the knowledge of the essence of things in order to ascertain their causes."[21] Its members inevitably encountered difficulties from the Church, however pious they were as individuals. When the *Academia* was dissolved, Pozzo collected from it books on science, natural history and medicine as well as scientific instruments. The serious pursuit of science entailed spiritual dangers, which Pozzo and his contemporaries recognized. Pozzo's brother, Carlo Antonio, also displayed curiosity in the field of science, as did Tommaso Campanella who, aside from other beliefs mentioned earlier, wrote a defence on Galileo's behalf. This interest in science linked Poussin with the *Libertins*.

The members of the *Libertins* group encouraged freedom of thought. They were Humanists and Stoics in their stand on ancient philosophy and thus were opposed to the Scholasticism of the established Church. They investigated different religious sects and promoted the formation of a personal philosophy. They were supportive of science, as expounded by Copernicus and Galileo, and were Rationalists, though they accepted the basic

precepts of Christianity. They were in effect Humanist Christians.[22] The *Libertins* owed a debt to Pierre Charron and Montaigne, who were Christian Stoics.

Poussin, like the *Libertins*, upheld Copernicus' theories and adopted Copernicus' views of Christianity. Poussin's friend and patron in Paris, Chantelou, also embraced Libertine concepts. He showed contempt for the Roman Catholic Church in his diary on the travels of Bernini in France.[23]

Late in life, Poussin's closest colleagues were Chantelou and Cardinal Camillo Massimi. Massimi was an avid collector and a learned man and though a man of the cloth, appreciated the old Poussin's enigmatic works. It was, indeed, to Camillo Massimi that Poussin left his final chef d'oeuvre, *The Apollo and Daphne* of 1665 today in the Louvre. (Fig.17)

Poussin's religious horizons lay far beyond the Papal Court. His paintings represent a shift from the ordinary expressions of religious emotion to a private devotional image. Both Poussin's and Pozzo's enquiry into the fundamentals of other religions, displays their ability to reconcile different theological beliefs. They were sincere, if not ardent, Christians, including in their investigations the fruits of their research, scientific analysis, as well as the results of their Stoic and Libertine associations. Montaigne, one of the few writers cited by Poussin in his letters, was a devout Catholic, despite being a Sceptic and a Stoic, and inspite of his adoption of a rational approach to religion.[24] The image we form of Poussin, especially in later life, is quite similar to that of Montaigne. Though Poussin rarely mentioned his persuasion, and was critical of the clergy, he seems to have remained a loyal Catholic. His devotion was, however, private. Ironically, Bernini appears to have understood Poussin's religiosity, perhaps the best stating that the *Extreme Unction*; "Faisait le même [effet] qu'une belle prédication qu'on écoute avec attention fort grande et dont on sort après sans rien dire, mais que l'effet s'en ressent au-dedans."[25]

CHAPTER III: NICOLAS POUSSIN'S LANDSCAPES

Poussin's beliefs are disclosed in his later landscapes. Nature to Poussin comprised layers of meaning, incorporating knowledge and faith, interspersed with ambiguity and doubt. His landscapes express in pictorial terms what they signify allegorically. All is symbol and hieroglyph of nature's deeper significance. As observed by Hazlitt: "Landscape of Poussin...at his touch...words start up into landscapes, thoughts become things."[1]

Poussin creates a form of Stoic-Pantheism in which nature is a reflection of the Logos. The Stoic Logos and Christian God are linked to the cycles of life through the process of nature which is most evident in his last landscapes *The Four Seasons.* Notwithstanding his penchant for Stoicism, in which passion is nothing without reason, Poussin was also an artist of genuinely Romantic temperament. This trait can best be detected in his early Titianesque works and again in his later landscapes, though it is apparent even in his most notedly Classical works.

Art critics such as Bellori and Félibien, were mistaken in their classification of Poussin's paintings as dogmatic since their analysis relied solely on extracting the Classical traits in Poussin's art. They overlooked the fact that Stoicism, like Christianity, was Romantic in spirit, the culmination of life being the release of the soul. In this context, Poussin's own commentary on his depictions is important. He says that, "They express the various passions of the soul and make visible what is in the mind," and that one has to "know how to read them."[2]

The first reference to Poussin as a landscape painter was made in a letter of 1630, though he had made sketches from nature for years, consisting of studies of trees, birds and flowers, for Pozzo's *Paper Museum* and for his own purposes. He had occasionally painted unofficial landscapes for Cassiano dal Pozzo and Vincenzo Giustiniani.[3] Such informal pictures gave him a feel for natural phenomena.

The scheme and treatment of Titian's landscapes had impressed the youthful Poussin more than the Bolognese landscapes of Raphael, Domenichino or the Carracci. The mythologies of Poussin's Roman years prior to 1640, are replete with landscape sections rendered in Titian's atmospheric pictorial style. Paintings such as the *Echo and Narcissus* (Fig.3a) finished in 1627, display a loose, almost impressionistic rendition of large trees, extremely close to the Titianesque

idiom. A sentimental and romantic story is expressed with a lyrical device. As with Titian, a deeper meaning lies obscured.

Through Titian's indirect influence, Poussin was most likely introduced to another form of landscape painting, that of the Danube School. His *Landscape with St Jerome* (Fig.7a) of 1638-39 in the Prado, exemplifies the impact of Northern Renaissance landscapes. Advocates of this School, such as Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538), manifest great similarities with the Romantics of the nineteenth century. In Altdorfer's *Repentance of St Jerome* (Fig.7b) of 1507 in Berlin, the microcosm of man is set within the macrocosm of nature. Such representations are imbued with the Venetian spirit. Nature can be calm and benign or wild and forbidding. Man is part of the greater mystical unity of nature, for the death of man implies that he has succumbed to the throes of nature. The seasons of the year; the cycles of growth, decay and rebirth were, thus, of particular interest to Altdorfer as they were later to Poussin and to the Romantics of the nineteenth century. Altdorfer's landscapes are endowed with a mysticism and religiosity, associated with Nicolas of Cusa, whose writings were known also to Poussin. Nature was seen as the one and the Infinite. This sixteenth century attitude is reflected in the contemporary criticism of Winziger on Cusa: "Der Mensch steht vor den Unendlichen einsam."[4] (Man stands alone in the face of the Infinite.) The self-awareness of the individual and his communication with God who is part of a boundless universe, is a phenomenon of great irrational subjectivity that influenced not only the Romantics such as Friedrich, but also Poussin.

However, during the 1640s, Poussin's landscapes undergo a change. The Romantic, lyrical Venetian/Danube School manner of the twenties and thirties, is replaced in the forties by a geometricized, crystallized image. In the *Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion* of 1648 in the Collection of the Earl of Derby, Lancaster (Fig.8), law is imposed by man. Such "Classical landscapes" are clear, balanced, measurable and intelligible. Though based on nature, these views are superior to it, owing to a selective mind which reason directs. The land is consecrated to the heroes of antiquity. Rogier de Piles categorized these landscapes as "heroic."[5] However, within the controlled nature of *Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion* there broods the untamed mystery of the mountain in the background, occupying an irrational shape, which intensifies its position.[6] The mountain is indicative of a darker, more enigmatic force within nature that appears in muted, elusive ways. This mountain scape remains trapped within the overall rationality of the painting. It offers an uncanny, disquieting alternative to the central drama, deluding the viewer. Such an image reveals Poussin's experience of Stoicism at this time, as the Stoic doctrine is to live according to nature.

After 1648 Poussin executed twelve landscapes that portray a wide variety of moods, from extreme calm to wild excitement. They were all painted within a relatively short period and, though obviously landscapes, are also illustrations of the Sacraments. Poussin's comments on the *Sacraments* of 1644-48, executed for Chantelou, are relevant to this set of twelve scenes:

> Je souhaiterais s'il était possible, que ces Sept Sacrements fussent convertis en sept autres histoires ou fussent représenté au vif les plus étranges tours que la fortune ait jamais joués aux hommes, et particulièrement à ceux qui se sont moqués de ses éfforts.[7]

An atmosphere of calm Stoical solitude and retreat from the world is presented in the *Landscape with St Francis* in the President's Palace in Belgrade and in the *Landscape with Diogenes* in the Louvre. By contrast, the *Landscape with Man Killed by a Snake* in London's National Gallery, depicts the ominous side of nature -its exhilaration in a moment of horror. The mood of fear of death pervades the scene, while the landscape remains serene and unmoved. The painting of a *Landscape with a Storm* in Rouen, displays atmospheric turmoil. The climax of such images of dynamism is the *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* of 1651, in Frankfurt (Fig.9), executed for Cassiano dal Pozzo. Poussin remarked: "I have tried to paint a storm...causing great disorder."[8] Félibien declared that with Poussin's later landscapes: "extraordinary actions...give satisfaction to the mind and at the same time please the eyes."[9] This statement recognizes that Poussin invests the beauty of nature with didactic significance. The fear of fate prevails in these depictions, a manifestation of Poussin's own state of mind, which was obsessed with, "La fragilité de la fortune des hommes."[10] These paintings exemplify Poussin's apprehension concerning the instability of human life and the catastrophes that seize man unawares. Poussin's vision of life at this time demanded that man be constantly on his guard.

This attitude was not newly developed, but rather, was expressed earlier in such images as the *Et in Arcadia Ego* of1638 in the Louvre (Fig.10). This is, in short, a *memento mori* , as attested by the words: "I (death) exist even in Arcadia."[11] The shadow on the tomb functions as a focusing device on the central theme of mortality.[12] This scene is also reminiscent of the passage in the Bible which speaks of the "shadow of death." However, in this picture , as in Christianity, it is not so much fear, as meditation, that is invoked through the proximity of death. Moreover, the role of fate was great in the seventeenth century, and a common subject for illustration.

The influence of Leonardo da Vinci and the artist's brother-in-law, Gaspard Dughet, emerges as Poussin's landscapes become more emotionally charged, and far less geometric in character. But this shift, above all, reflects a change in thought process. Nature itself appears to be both benign and destructive. It becomes, indeed, an ambivalent force. This serene world embodies the secrets of life and death. In *The Holy Family in Egypt* of 1655-57 in the Hermitage, Leningrad (Fig.11), a retreat from antiquarianism and rationalism is evident; the theme of a landscape within a landscape as in the *Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion* of1648 reappears.[13] In *The Holy Family in Egypt*, the foreground figures give way to a view of Rome in the background. This encompasses a move in space and time in the search for truth. Thus, the New Testament story of the Holy Family in Egypt becomes a mask for the image of real interest to the Baroque age, the Triumph of Christianity. The past envisages the future through Christ's life. Poussin's dissatisfaction with the narrow, localized manner in which the Bible was illustrated, gives way to an inversion and a play on ideas. Unlike Rubens or Bernini whose concerns in religious pictures were for accuracy of archaeological rendition, narrative and time; Poussin united past, present and future in his timeless, personal vision of antiquity. An indifference to facts is evidenced. In *The Exposition of Moses* (Fig.2b) we encounter a multiplicity of temporal experiences; the Pan pipes in the tree exalt the past Bacchanalian god, Moses refers to the present time of the scene in the painting, and Christ to the future. The perception of the world which emerges is ambivalent, appropriate to the Baroque era. Nature serves effectively as vehicle of expression. For Poussin, nature embodied layers of time,of culture and of meaning.

The principal manifestation of nature's mystery has long appeared in the form of the snake.[14] The Roman Stoics wrote of the equivocal character of the snake. The snake in Poussin's mature paintings, such as the *Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice* in the Louvre, and the drawing of *The Rape of Europa* of 1649-50 in the Fogg Art Museum (Fig.12), is ominous as is the introduction of narratives unrelated to the main subject. In *The Rape of Europa*, fertility and peace are combined with the horror of death, visualized in the snake pursuing Eurydice. This passage may disclose the Stoic pessimism of an old man, for whom there was no possibility of joy or happiness, without the potentiality for disaster which is here imminent. There is also a strangeness about the figures. The sublime beauties of earlier years are replaced by mask-like faces, almost caricature-like as in the mosaics of Palestrina. In Poussin's *Landscape with Two Nymphs and a Snake* of 1659 in the Musée Condée, Chantilly (Fig.13), the snake has no specific meaning, except perhaps to underline the threat inherent in nature, which is here in its primordial state of beauty. The nymphs are transfixed by the snake attempting to swallow a bird. The bird in Egyptian, Greek and Roman art as well as in Christianity, was symbolic of the soul and the process of spiritualization. It had a formidable antagonist in the snake. Seneca in *Medea* identified

"orbes" as the word for the snake's writhing coils and for cosmic order. The snake is guardian of the spring of life and immortality and the riches of the spirit. In Poussin's painting, the prowess of the snake produces an unsettling effect on the sculptural calm of the moment.

In the later years of Poussin's life, from 1657-1665, his landscapes increase in their power of expression and in their cryptic quality. In the *Landscape with Polyphemus* of 1649 in the Hermitage Museum of Leningrad (Fig.14), the old giant forms an integral part of nature itself, as he molds with the mountain in the distance, piping to an invisible Galatea. A second scene or space is, thus, emphasized as in some works previously mentioned such as the *Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion* and the *Holy Family in Egypt*. The reaction of the foreground figures is one of foreboding; their fate is sealed; escape is impossible. As Poussin himself recounted, though in a different context: "Savons nous si nous (nous) pouvons cacher sous la peau de la brébis, et évitons les sanglantes mains de Cyclope enragé et furieux."[15] But such an idea could be applied to Poussin's painting, though this quotation was specifically a response to the Fronde of 1649. The large expanses of monochromatic colouring of this fecund nature increases the effect of a threatening yet irresistible force.

Poussin's earlier paintings consist of the expressive interplay of actions and gestures and clear spatial construction, the later paintings show the figures in quiet, lonely repose. They hardly seem to react to one another, though they are linked in a lyrical, resonant rhythm and are placed in a large, rich landscape. Aside from the works already mentioned, the works which most effectively embody this new quality are the *Landscape with the Blind Orion* of1658 in the Metropolitan Museum, the drawing of *The Birth of Bacchus* of 1657 in the Fogg Art Museum, the *Apollo and Daphne* of1665 in the Louvre, and, above all, *The Four Seasons* of1660-64 also in the Louvre.

These renditions are a result of Poussin's individual conception at this late stage of his life. The *Landscape with the Blind Orion* (Fig.15) is understandable within the context of Poussin's psychological and stylistic change in the later years of his life. Executed in a definite anti-classical manner, Poussin turned not to the more obvious tale from Ovid's *Fasti* for the subject, but instead, to the sixteenth-century myth by Natalis Comes. He interpreted the legends of the gods and heroes in terms of natural phenomena. Orion, the helpless giant, incorporates within himself natural forces, for according to legend, he was a mixture of earth, water, air, and sun. He was the son of Jupiter, Neptune and Apollo. The figure of Diana here present, had a meterological significance.[16] Man in *Landscape with the Blind Orion* is no longer in control of nature, but in awe of it. The vague pantheistic imagination of Poussin's late period is here readily evident.

In Poussin's drawing *The Birth of Bacchus* of 1657 (Fig.16) Bacchus is the god of both life and the mysteries of death. In this rendition, Bacchus, brought by Mercury, is cared for by the nymphs. Vines burst into new growth around Bacchus' cave as a result of his fertility which is a description of the infusion of life into matter of the creation by God. As described by Natalis Comes: "The ancients called those parts of the seed or water by means of which generation takes place by the name of nymphs."[17] The infertile love of Echo and Narcissus, to the right of the canvas, is contrasted with the nymphs' fecundity. The presence of Narcissus is a further analogy to Christ and the pattern of life, death and resurrection symbolized in the cycles of nature. The cave is where the birth and death of Bacchus and of Christ took place. In initiation ceremonies, the cave was the entrance to the underworld like the sepulchre.

A halo-like formation appears around the Bacchus child. This halo is a relic of the solar cults, spreading spiritual light. This fire symbol is alluded to in the figure of the Apollo child above the cave with rays emanating from him. Thus, Apollo, Bacchus and Christ are linked into one as sources of physical and spiritual life, reflecting the cycles of nature as indicated by Natalis Comes: "Dionysus is the virtue of the sun in relation to generation."[18] Pan sits at the top of the cave summoning rebirth and fertility with his pan pipes. He was identified at the time with the movement of the spheres, thus, connecting Poussin's drawing to the science of Galileo and Kepler, a subject discussed so often by Poussin and his circle of friends. Tommaso Campanella, the Dominican monk, mentioned in previous chapters in connection with Poussin's circle, wrote a book whilst imprisoned, entitled *The City of the Sun.* The title page of this utopia shows the earth, the palm, the sun, and vines, growing towards the source of life-the sun and in it Campanella wrote: "The sun is the link between earth and air, as blood is the milk between spiritus and body in animals...God, from whom came health and heat and all other things."[19] The similarity of conception to numerous representations by Poussin, including *The Birth of Bacchus,* is apparent, particularly in the depiction of the gods as the cyclical movements of nature and as the source of spiritual nourishment.

In Poussin's final work, the *Apollo and Daphne* (Fig.17), there is an atmosphere of immobile tranquillity. The beauty of a paradisiac Golden age is illustrated. An ominous, tense and psychological mood pervades in the midst of ideal beauty, a premonition of tragedy permeates these peaceful figures awaiting fate in breathless suspense. The eternal calm of this painting is disturbed by the presence of death and tragedy in the figure of Hyacinthus, who Apollo had accidentally killed.

One might question why, at the point in time when he was creating his most Humanist paintings, Poussin produced landscapes. The answer may in part lie in the fact that nature was now studied for its own sake, because it is a reflection of the Logos, the infusion of the Word into inanimate matter. Nature, therefore, in the tradition of the Venetian landscapists and the Northern Danube School, had an equal claim to man as subject of the painter's interest. In Poussin the balance now existed between man and nature. Poussin understood his position with respect to nature, which was not to be controlled solely according to man's reason, for rationality is also inherent in nature. To the future Romantics, as to Poussin, man stands in awe and confusion before nature yet he is an integral part of the complex world he observes. In Baudelaire's words:

> Nature is a Temple in which living columns
> Sometimes emit confused words;
> Man approaches it through forests of symbols
> Which observe him with familiar glances.[20]

CHAPTER IV: NICOLAS POUSSIN'S *THE FOUR SEASONS*

Poussin's *The Four Seasons* (Figs.18.a,b,c,d), were executed in the last years of his life, between 1660-1665, for the Duc de Richelieu. These pictures demonstrate a change in style that might, typically, be associated with an artist's old age and vast experience since one may recognize in the late works of Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt similar progressions. Poussin develops a deeper, broader imagination, creating paintings of a sublime character.[1] The total impression is sought in these late representations. A new moving lyricism, almost a revival of Poussin's youthful depictions such as *Echo and Narcissus* manifests itself. The tone is now even more mysterious and elegiac. A psychological disposition infiltrates these later images. Poussin is constantly aware of the frailty of life and of the caprices of fortune. The metaphorical snake still lurks in the grass. Poussin's temperament is connected with his Stoical philosophy, his sense of insecurity concerning the fate of the world, becomes an obsession in the later life of the aging "peintre-philosophe." Even as early as August 2. 1648, Poussin asserted in a letter: "Vertù, conscience, religion sont bannies d'entre les hommes, il n'y a que la vice...Tout est perdu. Je désespère le bien.'[2]

In his last years, Poussin was ailing and in pain. He complained endlessly of his trembling hand, worsened with age. The shakiness of broken lines in his late drawings and paintings is evidence of this handicap. As noted by Bellori: "Tremours and shaking of the pulse."[3] Poussin himself stated in a letter of November 25, 1658: "Je n'écris point à Madame pour la difficulté de ma main tremblante."[4] Moreover, Poussin complained often of illness. In a letter of April 2, 1653, he told of: "Un gros cartarrhe qui (lui) est tombé sur la poitrine et qui l'incommodi."[5] And in 1657, he referred to, "Les diverses incommodités que j'ai et qui se vont multipliant avec l'âge m'empêchent de vous écrire."6 It was after 1658, that Poussin's health really began to deteriorate. In his letter to M. de Chantelou of August 2, 1660, he wrote:

> Je me passe aucun jour sans douleur, et le tremblement de mes membres augmente comme les ans. L'excés de la chaleur de la saison présente me bat en ruine, et partant j'ai été constraint d'abandonner tout labeur et de mettre les couleurs et les pinceaux à part. Si je vis cet automme, j'espère te les reprendre, particulierement pour vous...et arrive ce qu'il voudra de ma personne.[7]

And again on November 16, 1664, he said: "J'ai si grande difficulté à écrire pour le grand tremblement de ma main que je n'écris point présentement à Monsieur de Chambray."[8]

It was not only illness that made Poussin fear his approaching death. He also experienced great emotional devastation following the deaths of his friend and patron Cassiano dal Pozzo on October 22, 1657, and his beloved wife, Anne on October 16, 1664. Of his wife Poussin declared on November 16, 1664: "(Elle) est morte, quand j'avais (le) plus besoin de son secours, m'ayant laissé chargé d'années paralytique, plein d'infirmités de toutes sortes, étranger et sans amis...Voilà l'état où je me trouve."[9]

Poussin grew melancholic towards the end. He acted as the calm Stoic preparing himself for imminent death. In a letter of March 15, 1658, he expressed the following: "Si la main me voulait obéir, j'aurais quelque occasion de dire ce que Themistocle dit en soupirant sur la fin de sa vie, que l'homme finit et s'en va quand il est plus capable ou qu'il est prêt à bien faire."[10] His despair is more fully evident in a letter of July 1663: "J'ai quitté les pinceaux pour toujours, et ne pense qu'à mourir...Dieu veuille que ce soit bientôt, car la vie me pèse trop."[11] But surely Poussin's thoughts could not have been totally negative, for as a Stoic he, like Seneca, must have understood that suffering, as in Christianity, lead eventually to blissful rebirth into God's realm; that man's life was merely a small part of a far- reaching ordered plan. In Seneca's words:

> The hindrances to human existence are the prelude to a longer and better life, the child's presence in the womb prior to its birth resembling our preparation from infancy to old age, for another birth, a different beginning and a different condition awaiting us.[12]

The introverted mind of the aging Poussin most displays, perhaps, his links with the Sceptics and philosophers of his day, though it must be restated that such groups never departed entirely from the Church. This doubting state of mind was natural in a man of such character awaiting death, be it Pagan Fate or Christian Providence. In Stoic philosophy, man awaits at the apex of his life for the release of his soul, a decidedly Romantic notion with similarities to the Christian's separation of spirit from matter. Moreover, as stated previously, the writings of Seneca and the Stoics, in general, were given Christian interpretations during the seventeenth century by Jansenists, Jesuits, Catholics and Protestants alike.

The hidden interpretations in *The Four Seasons* are closely linked, in my opinion, to Poussin's philosophy at the end of his life, as well as to his response to the theological and

intellectual questions of his time. The ideas present in these works, as in his late landscapes, are not readily understood. Poussin was secretive as to his personal persuasions. Like Heraclitus and the Stoics, he promoted the Delphic practice of seeing things on a deeper level. For according to Heraclitus, "The Lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign."[13] Appropriately, then, *The Four Seasons* seem to support this statement.

Poussin places his corporeal figures in an unreal and undefined world. This is the setting for his final images, in which his last fears and beliefs are revealed. The lyricism of Poussin's earlier Titianesque works reappears with the same allusions to Christianity. Before these poems composed by a trembling hand, we recognize the effect and impact of Poussin's thought. The figures are moved closer to us. We feel drawn both physically and mentally into their painted world.

Poussin's thoughts focussed on his own death as he painted this series. There is sadness within *The Four Seasons* for all is ephemeral. As Courthion observed about Poussin: "Alors, en se sentant vieillir, il a peur de ne plus revoir les saisons et veut se donner en peinture cette suprême fête: revivre le printemps, revoir l'été, repasser l'automne, marquer l'hiver de son éxistance."[14] The seasons affected Poussin greatly as they increased his awareness of his own illness and mortality. Jacques Thuillier has noted that: "Poussin aux changements de saison, n'échappait guère à leur atteinte, plus graves et plus longue à mesure que ses forces déclinaient."[15] On several occasions Poussin expressed his discomfort at the seasonal changes. On August 7, and September 11, 1644 he complained of the heat of summer: "Les chaleurs de l'été."[16] On November 22, 1648, he was upset by the cold of Winter.[17]

The late landscapes are symbols for transcendental meditations. *The Four Seasons* are pantheistic images, the product of Poussin's conceptualisation towards the end of his life. His later landscapes in general, as indicated in Chapter III, address the enigma of life and death, and of a Stoic pessimism. The cycle of *The Four Seasons* continues to suggest such religious, philosophical mysteries. The seasons incorporate a year from beginning through to end, as well as the promise of the rebirth of a new year. Thus, the seasons may be considered as a mirror image of human life.

The ideas present in Poussin's *The Four Seasons* have precedents in the literature and thought of the Middle Ages, when according to Hart Crane, "Nothing perishes except with a view to salvation; and all things return to that beauty for which they are destined at our creation, had we not sinned in Paradise."[18] The narrative of Christ's birth and death signalled to both Baroque and

Medieval man, the changing aspects of landscape and weather. The altering seasons of the year brought man to the realisation that beyond the apparent wilfulness of nature, lay a divine and beneficent reason. An understanding of the mechanism governing the cyclical phenomena of the earth, its disappearance and reappearance had been inherited from the ancient world. The poetry of Lucretius and Virgil, known to Poussin, speak, for instance, of the order of nature in the movements of planets and the linked progression of the seasons. The seasons, from flowering Spring to barren Winter, were described as mythological deities by Ovid: "Verque novum stabat cinctum florente corona, stabat nuda Aestas et spicea serta gerebat, stabat et Autumnus calcatis sordidus uvis et glacialis thiemis canos hirsutacapillos."[19] (Young Spring was there, wreathed with a floral crown; Summer, all unclad with garland and ripe grain; Autumn was there, stained with the trodden grape,and icy Winter with white and bristly locks.) Such seasonal images appear in Poussin's *The Four Seasons* : in *Spring* or *Earthly Paradise*, flowers frame the two figures; in *Summer* or *Ruth and Boaz*, the woman has corn in her hair; in *Autumn* or *The Spies with the Grapes* from the Promised Land, the grapes are transported; and, *Winter* or *The Flood*, includes an old man and a child.

The Seasons had long influenced Christian thought and feeling. A melancholy awareness of the imminent death of beauty and of life is apparent: "Mirabar celerem fugitiva oetate rapinam et,dum nascatur, consenuisse rosas."[20] (I marvel at the swift thought of age in flight, and the roses fully, even as they came to blow.) The sudden destructiveness of nature is visualized in Poussin's *Winter, The Flood.* This was, however, justified by Virgil in his *Georgics*, through his description of the relationship of man to nature as "the rocky path of virtue," which is later repeated in Christian teaching: "Pater ipse colendi naud facilem esse viam voluit."[21] (The Great Father himself has willed that the path should not be smooth.) The Christian myth of the Fall and Expulsion, was thought to symbolize physical life and spiritual death. Seasonal toil was related to the sins of men. The image of exile was seen as an ice cold sea, as in Poussin's *Winter, The Flood*, representative of the inner destruction of the spirit and exile from Grace. The progression of a year from cold Winter to hot Summer, implied a divine controller of the sad, inevitable flux of matter. Disaster was thus present on earth, but Providence was offered after the storm, as seen in Poussin's *Spring, Earthly Paradise.* Man struggled against uncertainty in search of stability beyond represented in the regular pattern of growth, subject to chance and change. Good and ill in the world were viewed as the expression of man's inner struggle for the fruitful life of the spirit:

> Cursed is the earth in your labour: in toil shall you win sustenance from it all the days of your life. (Genesis 3:17)

Classical motifs of the seasons were incorporated into a Christian formula. The sculptural programmes of the Romanesque and Gothic Church spoke of Christ Pantocrator as the giver of wheat and wine, the Eucharist as visualised in the wheat (bread) of *Summer, Ruth and Boaz*, and the grapes (Wine) of *Autumn, The Spies with the Grapes from the Promised Land.* Summer for the Church foretold heavenly bliss, and Winter the end of life: "Aestas autem jucundita praefiguratio est...Aestas futura beatitudo...Hiems vero tribulationem significat vel terminum mortale vitae."[22] Seasonal change was the image of mortality itself during which man was delayed in his progress on earth no longer than it took him to contemplate death. The seasons further embodied cosmic significance. The records of man's year, as seen for instance in Calendar manuscripts and paintings, were invested with a seriousness which blended scientific interest with philosophic and religious belief.[23] Ultimately, the seasons bore witness to systems greater than themselves. They provided structure and sanction for changing times in history. Through the seasons, a theological basis was given to the natural world.

Within the Christian Calendar, the seasons had a specific place, beginning with Winter, the season in which Christ was born. The 25th of December was also the shortest day of the year, and the date of the old pagan festival for the worship of the sun. Spring, the next season in sequence, was the occasion of Christ's death and His resurrection. This was a reminder of new life, which returns to trees and plants in spring in the forms of blossoms and flowers.[24] The cycle of Christ's life is thus reflected in the seasons. In Christianity, seasonal stability was often contrasted with human instability, though the struggles of man culminated in security. Man stood, however, before an unknown future as did Poussin. The landscape in the thirteenth century, as in the Baroque era of Poussin, reflected the mind and emotions of man.

The illustration of the seasons was uncommon in the seventeenth century, though, as shown, quite representative of Medieval and Renaissance art, and later of the nineteenth-century Romantics with the music of Vivaldi or the poetry of James Thomson. The illustration of the seasons progressed from simple symbols in antiquity to full landscapes in the Renaissance as with Bruegel and later Altdorfer. Religious narratives were often set within a seasonal context implying deeper significance, as seen in The Brussels Hours for Jean de Berri in which he included the cycles of Christ's life in a seasonal setting (Fig.19).

The symbols of the seasons surrounding scenes of Daniel in the Lion's Den, with alternating representations of the Good Shepherd and Orants, in the early Christian catacombs, exemplify perfectly the relation of the seasons to Christ.(Fig.20) Poussin did likewise in *The Four Seasons* (Fig.18). What is more, his series also relates to the theme of salvation prevalent in the

catacombs. The early Christian frescoes were definitely known to Poussin and to his times in general through such publications as Antonio Bossio's *Roma Sotterranea* in Rome in 1651.

The motion of the seasons and of day and night were described by many of the early Fathers, under the influence of the Stoics. The seasons were to Christians and Stoics, manifestations of the harmony of nature. For Christians, they further embodied the concepts of the death and resurrection of Christ and the salvation of man. This is exemplified in the words of Minucius Felix:

> Look at the fixed and varying phases in the succession of the seasons and the crops. Does not Spring with its flowers attest its author's parent, Summer with its harvests, the mellower ripeness of Autumn, and Winter with its needed olive yield? How easily would confusion overtake the order, were it not held together by sovereign reason. See how, to break the spell of Winter's blistering ice or Summer's parching heat, Providence interposed the temperate means of Autumn and Spring, so that the year, returning on its traces, might glide forward on its imperceptible innocuous round.[25]

Clement of Rome in his first epistle to the Corinthians, analyses the succession of day and night and the seasons within a more specifically Christian context: "The Lord is continually proving to us the resurrection that is to be, the first fruits of which he constituted by raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead."[26]

In creating *The Four Seasons*, Poussin could and did rely on a long tradition of pagan and Christian iconography and interpretation. Poussin himself had included the seasons in earlier works, in his Putti paintings such as *Putti with Chariot and Goats* of 1625 for Cardinal Richelieu. (Fig.21) Poussin's putti perform actions of the year, related to the seasons, as they do in ancient sarcophagi. To the Stoics, putti were allegories of the phenomena of the universe. Several of Poussin's mythological representations such as *The Birth of Bacchus* of 1657, discussed in Chapter II, also relate to the seasons. Bacchus-Dionysus is the god of wine, the vines, blossoms and seasonal changes. Bacchus is linked with Christ, the vine, adorning numerous sarcophagi, and is thereby, connected with the afterlife. Fertility rites were linked with ancestor cults of resurrection, harvests and fecundity. The Lord's relationship with nature is apparent in the following passage from the Bible (Hosea 6:3):

> Then we shall know, if we follow on to the Lord:
> his going forth is prepared as the morning and he
> shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and
> the former rain unto the earth.

Poussin in *The Four Seasons* enters the realm of poetry and religious ritual. A mood of detachment from worldly associations is depicted. The world of Baroque sensuality is left behind. These "altarpieces" to the artist's personal religion are shrouded in an enigma left to the viewer to decipher. Poussin himself indicated that there is a method by which one should approach art:

> There are two ways of seeing things. One is simply looking at them, the other means considering them attentively. Only to see is nothing else but receiving into the eye the form or likeness of the object looked at, but to consider a thing is more than this, that is, to seek with special diligence after the means of knowing this object thoroughly.[27]

It is on this deeper level that *The Four Seasons* must be read. In my opinion, these paintings are a response to the questions posed regarding the position of man and religion in the universe. The Four Seasons represent Poussin's very personal statement in the twilight of his life; they unite science, Stoicism, and Christianity into a single expression with a definite Catholic intent, though not one that lay totally within the bounds of the Church officials of his time.

In these images God is described in terms of the universe as He was by Seneca: "He is Fate. All things depend on Him...He is one with Nature which absorbs the world at the great cyclic conflagration."[28] This form of Mysticism with its passionate search for God in nature and desire for union with the divine, verges on Pantheism. Nature is to be understood in the light of human experience, reflecting man's position within the world. Nature is the origin of all life and death. She brings forth the seasons and stimulates growth and new life. A landscape is therefore, not a mere backdrop to a religious scene, but an integral part of the subject. A visual realism, witnessed by the fading mountains in the background of Poussin's paintings, is wedded to a symbolic content, as is the case in Medieval art. Landscapes were, however, traditionally not easily comprehended. For example, the subject of Giorgione's *Tempesta* is ambiguous, though religious in content, as are Poussin's *The Four Seasons*. The English Romantic painter John Constable observed that, "The art of seeing Nature is a thing almost as much to be acquired as the art of reading the Egyptian hieroglyphs."[29]

Landscapes were also an effective way of showing the infinity of the universe as discovered by scientists of the age. God and man were seen as an integral part of this

boundlessness. Baroque art in general clearly reveals this extension of space, time and light.[30] In *The Four Seasons*, though, the paintings are accessible, they inhabit a space that is part of a wider expanse; the cities in the distance imply life beyond the present scene as do the boats in *Winter, The Flood*, which even suggest life beyond this world. Moreover, the four individual paintings comprising Poussin's *The Four Seasons*, form part of this series; these in turn are connected thematically with the rest of Poussin's oeuvre and stylistically with his later landscapes.

Each of Poussin's *The Four Seasons* is set within a similar landscape, but the progression of time is alluded to in the erosion of the landscape from *Spring, Earthly Paradise* to *Winter, The Flood*. Ovid, Lucretius and Horace associated seasonal changes with an external cycle of erosion, as visualized in *The Four Seasons*. Time in these paintings suggests movement. The advance of time is manifested in the times of day - morning, noon, evening and night. The course of time from Spring to Winter was similarly reflected in man - the development from childhood in Spring, youth in Summer, maturity in Autumn, to old age in Winter. Horace, in antiquity divided the ages of man into four parts, like the seasons of the natural world, and they were often referred to as the seasons of man. The ages of the world were also separated into four parts - Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron.[31] In *The Four Seasons* the advance in time could be followed in a different manner - from Winter to Spring, thence to Summer and Autumn. The child present in *Winter, The Flood*, could indicate the first stage of man followed by youth in *Spring, Earthly Paradise*. In the Christian Calendar, as indicated, Christ's life is viewed in accordance with the seasons, beginning with His birth in Winter. In *The Four Seasons* time is a cosmic principle that governs the rhythm of human existence, an endless, recurrent cycle paralleling the natural condition. The transience of human life and nature is revealed. Though this is a destructive concept, there is always hope. For, in Winter, nature dies as does an old man, but life continues with the promise of Spring in this world and in the next, as symbolized of the child in *Winter, The Flood*. In Seneca's words: "The day feared as the end of all things is but the birthday of man's eternity."[32]

Light is treated naturalistically in *The Four Seasons*. It is also symbolical of the Stoic Logos and the Christian Light of the world, the knowledge of which, according to Stoicism, enlightens man. In the painting of *Spring, Earthly Paradise*, the rising sun is the visible manifestation of the supernatural, as is the lightning flash in *Winter, The Flood*. Light envisages limitless space and as such it is Copernicus' sun.

Poussin's *The Four Seasons* have the titles of *Spring* or *Earthly Paradise*, *Summer* or *Ruth and Boaz*, *Autumn* or *The Spies with the Grapes from the Promised Land*, and *Winter* or

The Flood. The paintings are currently read in an order beginning with *Spring*, *Earthly Paradise*, and ending with *Winter*, *The Flood.* Poussin, undoubtedly, saw Cortona's *The Four Ages of Man* of 1637 in the Pitti Palace in Florence, especially, in view of the fact that Cortona associated with the Pozzo circle. Cortona's paintings can be followed both from *The Age of Gold* to *The Age of Iron*, in accordance with Ovid, and backwards, beginning with *The Age of Iron* and ending with *The Age of Gold*, thereby giving the painting a Christian New Testament interpretation. The gradual enlightenment of man and his knowledge of eternity in Christ, the Eucharist, is delineated in the wheat and the grapes of *The Age of Silver.* The ships, symbols of the human soul in *The Age of Silver*, are greeted with the wreath of victory in *The Age of Gold*, Paradise.[33] The chronology of Poussin's paintings should also be questioned. There are, in my opinion, great similarities between Cortona's *The Four Ages of Man* and Poussin's *The Four Seasons*, particularly in the interpretation of the Eucharistic symbols. Furthermore, both *The Four Ages of Man* and *The Four Seasons* can be given a cyclical reading. This is a Stoic idea, as indicated by Seneca: "The world's duty is to keep Nature circling round, as the sun's duty is to shift the points of its rising and setting."[34]

Winter, *The Flood*, can be seen as the beginning and the end. *Winter* is, in a sense, the first painting and the last, for inherent in the idea of chaos is a beginning and an end. As expressed by Seneca: "Death...makes it possible for me to preserve my soul. Death is the soul's reabsorption into Nature...whence it came."[35] *Winter* is, thus, the pivotal work in understanding the sequence of *The Four Seasons.* The Stoics claimed that everything had a beginning with the Logos. Moreover, Plutarch, quoted by Montaigne in the sixteenth century and Rabelais in seventeenth century, stated in his writings on Heraclitus: "In catastrophe Heraclitus sees the prelude of new times because in her yesterday died, today is born and tomorrow will be born."[36] The idea of the Stoic Logos as linked to creation influenced the early Church Fathers. St Paul wrote:

> And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been...in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. (Eph.3:9)

The Old Testament Genesis declared:

> In the beginning God created heaven and earth. (Genesis1:1)

The Old Testament Creation is present in Psalms:

> The Almighty God...hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. (Psalm 50:1)

And:

> By the Logos of the Lord the heavens were established. (Psalm 33:6)

But of greater significance is the New Testament creation according to the Gospel of St John:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made...In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men...And the Light shineth in darkness...The Logos was in the world. (John 1:1,4,5,10)

Both Philo and John speak of a transcendent god (Logos) who created the world and became immanent in the world. To the early Christian Fathers the Logos existed within a man endowed with a rational soul. The Logos as Christ incarnate was analogous to the soul in the body of men. It further constituted the two natures of Christ, the Logos and humanity in Him, two in one person. As observed by St Augustine: "The son of God, who is the Logos of God, has man, as soul has body...What is a man? A rational soul having a body. What is Christ? The Logos of God having man."[37] The New Testament "Word" or "Light" is the Logos of the Stoics, the fire of Heraclitus, and the Creator of heaven and earth in the Old Testament. It is God. The Gospel according to St John describes the creation of the divine Logos, Christ the son of God, in the image of His Father. It also denotes the creation of man made in the image of God, for the Logos in archaic philosophy was also the human spirit. The "Light" and sun of Macrobius was the creator of the physical and spiritual world

The idea of death is prevalent in *Winter, The Flood.* Death lies at the very core of Christianity, especially the life of Christ. Man abused immortality through sin and his Fall from Grace in the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve: "The wages of sin is death." (Rom.6:23) This event is depicted in Poussin's *Spring, Earthly Paradise*, in which God departs from creation as his plans were thwarted by man's actions. Death therefore, became the universal fate:

> Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men. (Rom.5:12)

The means of salvation lay in Baptism into Christ who saved man from the waters of spiritual death.(Rom.6:3,4) Poussin's *Winter, The Flood,* displays an abundance of water which could be associated with either destruction by water as in the Last Judgement, or cleansing. In Christianity, water has a regenerative quality, emblematic of renewal and purification through Baptism, the washing away of the sins and the rising to newness of life. (Rom.5:12) The Gospel according to St John affirms that Christ is the living waters of Grace. (John 7:37-38) The Old Testament equivalent is the tale of Noah who saved man from physical drowning, visualized by Poussin through the presence of Noah's ark in *Winter, The Flood.* Hence, typical of Poussin's paintings and source books of the time such as the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis,* there is a play on Old and New Testament parallels.

If one, therefore, begins the study of this series with *Winter, The Flood,* a state of chaos in a flood is depicted. Due to the relationship of a flood with the moon and water it is equated with death and regeneration. A flood is never a final act, but an intermediary place between life and death, the solid and the gaseous, the physical and the spiritual. According to Heraclitus: "(It) is the primordial chaos...the ether containing within itself all forms and all beings, all the seeds of universal creation."[38] The time is night, the moment preceding the creation of all things, anticipatory of promised daylight. Winter, as a season, embodies its own death in order that the birth of Spring might occur.

Water like trees, rocks and mountains, represents the cosmos in its entirety, containing life-giving and life-destroying forces. The negative aspect of water is evident in Poussin's *Winter, The Flood,* in the foreground figures, grasping for life. However, of equal importance is the second scene in the background, in which the ark of salvation and the renewing quality of water are alluded to. The dual potential of water for death and salvation is described by Heraclitus: "It is death to souls to become water, and death to water to become earth. But water comes from earth, and from water, soul."[39] Heraclitus emphasized the power of fate and the irreversible progression of time, which so obsessed Poussin in late life, as mentioned earlier: "You cannot step twice into the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you."[40] The moon present in *Winter, The Flood,* was the original source for the measure of time, later to be replaced in the seventeenth century by solar measures.[41] The moon is mediator between day and night, heaven and earth. It does not retain its identity of a circle, but is subject to the laws of change.

The phases of the moon, involving its waxing and waning, are analogous to the seasons of the year, and to the ages of man. The lunar and human condition are one as described by Eliade: "Death is not therefore, an extinction, but a temporal modification of the plan of life. For three nights, the moon disappears and on the fourth day is reborn."[42] According to Plutarch, the souls of the past were purified by the moon and then returned to the spirit, the sun. Heraclitus claimed that souls became "minds," expressing themselves in the form of lightening flashes, as depicted by Poussin in the sky of *Winter, The Flood.* [43] Lightning is also spiritual illumination, the realization of truth across time and space, the Eternal Now. It is the Spring principle and the Logos. The moon is further related to man in that it denotes human reason as reflected light from the sun, according to the Stoics.

Eternity is the sun as represented in the form of a child in the painting of *Winter, The Flood.* The child is also a future symbol of the soul. A child wrapped in a cloak as it is in *Winter, The Flood*, symbolizes this season. To Stoic philosophers such as Seneca and to Christianity, the child was youth and innocence, and the image of a transformed old man into new simplicity, implying a spiritual and intellectual rebirth: "Our preparation from infancy to old age, for another birth, a different beginning and a different condition awaiting us."[44]

The ark in the background scene of *Winter , The Flood,* is a sea and moon symbol. The ark floating on the waters is equated with the earth floating in the ocean of space, a possible allusion to science and the earth within the infinite universe. The ark was constructed according to human proportions. Thus, it came to symbolize the microcosm of man within the macrocosm of the universe. Noah's ark is emblematic of human life and preservation due to the forms of life contained within it. The Christian ark is the Church and Christ the Saviour. The early Church Father, St Ambrose, related the ship to the church and the ship's mast to the cross.[45] The ark (church) rides on the waters of life in order to reach the mountain of salvation, which is faintly delineated in the distance of *Winter, The Flood*, and in all three other paintings in this series.

The mountain, like the cross or cosmic tree, is situated in the centre of the world, the meeting place between heaven and earth. It typifies a state of full consciousness. Moreover, in Eliade's words: "The peak of the cosmic mountain... is the point where creation had its beginning."[46] The creation that occurs is that of spiritual man through the acceptance of Christ, the Saviour. The ark guides man through life to the mountain of salvation.

The ideas present in *Winter* or *The Flood* reinforce the cyclical view of life upheld by ancient philosophers. In Christian terms the process of life, death and rebirth is with Christ: "I am the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord." (Rev.1:8)

In *Winter, The Flood,* a snake inhabits a rocky area, which is a possible reference to Pluto, god of the underworld. The Stoics associated it with the ambivalence of Hades and water as the serpent is the governor of fate and fortune. The snake situated on a rock is also a life-force determining birth and rebirth. Due to the periodical renewal of its skin, the serpent signifies resurrection, the cycles of life and the cosmic order. The serpent is connected with mental forces by Seneca in *Medea.*[47] The serpent is invoked by the dead who cross the waters of life in the ark, visualised in *Winter, The Flood.* According to Macrobius, the python was brought forth by dampness and killed by the god of light: "He killed the serpent called Python ...what does it signify but the nature of the sun and world in relation to generation?"[48] The serpent with the tree, seen directly above it, in *Winter, The Flood,* prefigures Adam and Eve in mythology. Moreover, there is no serpent in *Spring, The Earthly Paradise.* This reinforces the cyclical interpretation of *The Four Seasons* beginning with *Winter* or *The Flood* and thence moving on to *Spring* or *Earthly Paradise, Summer* or *Ruth and Boaz* and *Autumn* or *The Spies with the Grapes from the Promised Land,* culminating with *Winter* or *The Flood.*

As one moves to *Spring, The Earthly Paradise,* the time changes from night to dawn, symbolic of the shedding of the blood of Christ. It is through Baptism (as seen in *Winter, The Flood*) that man would reach Paradise: "The garden of Paradise, and indeed heaven itself, is once again accessible to man."[49] St Gregory of Nyssa stated: "East, where God has planted his Paradise...a place in the sacramental sense, through Christ and baptism, open once more to man."[50] With *Spring, Earthly Paradise,* the darkness of sin (*Winter, The Flood*) is overcome. Dawn is the eternal salvation in the world of light. It represents the resurrection of Christ as the "Light," seen rising behind the head of Eve in Poussin's painting:

> Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the
> light of the world: he that followeth me shall not
> walk in darkness, but have the light of life. (John 8:12)

This description could also apply to Apollo, the sun god, pagan counterpart to Christ. The darkness of *Winter, The Flood,* typifies evil and the light in *Spring, Earthly Paradise,* is spiritual awakening into eternal life. At the Crucifixion of Christ both sun and moon were present as they are in Poussin's *Winter, The Flood,* and *Spring, Earthly Paradise.* In accordance with Macrobius

and Stoicism, the sun is the intelligence of the world and enlightenment.[51] The death of the sun implies resurrection, as the cycle of day and night is eternal.

Spring is a season in which flowers bloom like those seen beside Adam and Eve in *Spring, Earthly Paradise.* The Annunciation took place at Nazareth, which in Hebrew means "blooming." The Incarnation of Christ fell in Spring. Christ is also the Flower that promises fruit in due time through salvation. A poem on the Ave Maria in an Orationale of the fifteenth century is here appropriate:

> Det vitae remedum Iesus nobis, flos vernalis.[52]
> (My Christ give us Salvation, He who is a Spring flower)

Furthermore, it was thought from the Medieval age on, that because the month of April was the time of flowers, the Redemption of the world by divine Grace could be called the month of April.

The terrestrial Eden foreshadows the mystical Paradise which is attainable through God's Grace alone. St Augustine described the scriptural text of Genesis 2:8, as having, "A higher reality that exists in the world of eternity."[53] This celestial Paradise was pictured by the prophets as a place at the end of time. St Ambrose in *De Paradiso* identified Paradise as the interior of the soul, "The garden of man's heart."[54] The garden symbolizes the mystic journey of the soul to immortality. In Genesis Paradise is rich in sacramental truth, sensuous and spiritual, beautiful and frightening as it is in Poussin's *Spring, Earthly Paradise.*

Heaven is often set high in the rocky hills and mountains as pictured, for instance, in *Winter, The Flood,* "Whence not even the waters of the flood could reach it."[55] For many early Christians, Paradise was earthly and heavenly, fact and spirit. The baptismal revelry of man into Paradise and the redemptive care of Christ for man were depicted in Galla Placidia apse in Ravenna. Here as in Poussin's work, Christ is the new Adam. The original garden of Eden has been redeemed, sanctified and preserved. Thus, Adam's earthly Paradise parallels Christ's celestial Paradise. The forest in which the figures are situated in *Spring, Earthly Paradise,* obscures the light of the sun to a certain degree. The forest is a state of unconsciousness which the rising sun brings to consciousness. The Fall of man (Adam and Eve) implies the Incarnation. Eve is the mother of all things, and the Virgin, her inversion, is the mother of all souls. The story of Christ's sacrifice is the tale of man's entry into Paradise, a new Eden free from sin. Paradise is the lieu of man's salvation as recorded in the Bible: "Their soul shall be as a watered garden." (Jeremiah 31:12) The oak trees, abundant in *Spring, Earthly Paradise,* relate to Christ and the

Virgin as the oak is the true tree of the Cross. Due to their strength they symbolize Christian endurance in the face of adversity. In mythology they are Jupiter's tree for they attract lightning, as seen in *Winter, The Flood.* Furthermore, Apollo, upon killing the python, celebrated his victory at the Pythian games which represent the liberation of the soul, the Logos. At these games, oak wreathes were handed to the victors.

The ducks floating on the water in the distance of *Spring, Earthly Paradise*, could signify in accordance with Stoicism, the lovers of knowledge and cosmic awareness. They are seekers of wisdom and discover the Self in the universe which is a reference to the moi as described by Poussin. Ducks are said to float on the waters of immortality and spiritual rebirth.

Two tree types are discernible, aside from the oak, in *Spring, Earthly Paradise*: one is the orange tree, closest to the viewer, the other, is the apple tree. The placement of the orange tree in Paradise allies it with the Fall of man and his Redemption. The word for an apple in Latin is the same as that for evil, namely *malum.* It is for this reason that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden was thought to be apples, as depicted by Poussin in his painting of *Spring, Earthly Paradise.* In connection with Christ and the New Testament the apple has a different meaning; it is the new Adam, Christ, as is manifested in *Autumn, The Spies with the Grapes from the Promised Land.*

In Poussin's painting of *Spring, Earthly Paradise*, the natural world is, thus, explained in terms of a series of interventions and fulfilments. Reality is historical, sacramental and spiritual. It is man, the Christian Church, microcosm and macrocosm. Man looks to fruition of life, as the Christian soul, in Paradise.[56] Hence, this is not merely an illustration of a natural world garden in Spring time, nor of the Old Testament terrestrial Garden of Eden, but of the celestial Paradise of the New Testament, attainable through Christ.

In the painting of *Summer, Ruth and Boaz*, farming is taking place. Traditionally, the farmer's labours were thought to mimic celestial activities as farmers are the guardians of the old year and the new year. They are catalysts of regeneration and salvation joining every beginning to every end. Farming through the ages was seen as important to the development of cosmic consciousness in man. Herein lies a subtle allusion to science and specifically to Copernicus, as well as the ancient lyrical poets such as Pindar who believed that knowledge of the cosmos brought the spirit to light: "The dead seeds underground, can expect to return to life in a different form."[57]

In Poussin's picture, the man playing the bagpipe represents a fertile breath. Music is seen as part of the ordered pattern of the cosmos. The horses in *Summer, Ruth and Boaz*, are emblems of the sun as in ancient mythology. Horses are associated with burials and in the catacombs were symbolic of the swift passage of life. Horses replaced the bull as sacrificial animals. As solar animals, they represent the cyclical movement of world phenomena. In Christianity, they became symbolic of salvation.[58]

The shadows cast by the figures are an analogy to death as in Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* of 1638. (Fig.10) Furthermore, they have mask-like faces which resemble those on ancient sarcophagi.

Wheat which fills the fields of the *Summer, Ruth and Boaz*, painting is a well known Eucharistic symbol of the human nature of Christ. This interpretation is based upon the Gospel according to St John 12:24:

> Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

The following verses from St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians also help to clarify the simile:

> But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die...So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in corruption- seminatur corpus in corruptione, ut surget incorruptione. (St Paul 15:35,42)

The exegesis of the early Fathers further enlarged on this theme. St John Chrysostom wrote an extensive Homily on I Cor.15:35-36 and St Ambrose in his Commentaries to St Paul's Epistle asked, why there was doubt that God could make the dead rise as the corn rises by His command?[60] The *tertium comparationis* between man and corn was that both had to be buried in the soil to be reborn: resurrection was not possible without preceding death.

The Pauline "seminatur corpus in corruptione" was given more colour in Tertullian's *Apologeticus*:

> Day by day light is slain and shines once more; darkness in due turn departs and follows on again; and the dead stars come to life; seasons, when they end, begin anew; crops are matured and return, assuredly the seed must be wasted and dissolved to grow more fruitfully; everything is saved by being lost; everything is refashioned out of death-certe semina non nisi corrupta et dissoluta fecundius surgunt, omnia pereundo servantur, omnia de interitu reformantur.[60]

By the ninth century, corn had become the symbol of resurrection. Rabanus Maurus declared with reference to John 12:24: "Spiritaliter autem frumentum aut ipsum Redemptorem nostrum significat."[61]

The Biblical comparison of corn and man seems to have found no echo in the arts before the Counter Reformation, when suddenly it appears in emblematic literature. One of the first works in which it was to be found was Claude Paradin's *Dévises Héroiques* (Lyons, 1557), where a picture of bones with corn sprouting out of them is illustrated under the motto: "Spes altera vitae." His commentary explained: "Les grains des Blés, et autres herbages, semées et mortifiées en terre se revèrdoient, et prennent nouvel accroissement; aussi les corps humains tombant par Mort, seront relevés en gloire, par générale résurrection."[62] Emblem and motto were borrowed in 1590 by Joachim Camerarius for his *Symbolorum et Emblematum ex re herbaria desumtorum centuria.* His annotation was more explicit for those who knew that they would rise again; physical death meant new life: "Sercurus moritur, qui scit se morte renasci: Non ea mors dici, sed nova vita potest."[63] The note directs us to the Bible and the exegesis by St Ambrose and Chrysostom. We are here in the mental atmosphere of early Christianity.

The actual wheat of the fields in Poussin's *Summer, Ruth and Boaz,* is supplemented by the scene of the farmers or reapers in the background. This exemplifies the words of Tertullian: "The seed must be wasted and dissolved to grow more fruitfully."[64] Thus, man's hope for resurrection through the death of Christ is alluded to in *Summer, Ruth and Boaz,* as in *The Four Seasons* in general.

The "corn" of wheat in *Summer, Ruth and Boaz,* with the bunches of grapes, as seen in the *Autumn, Spies with Grapes from the Promised Land,* symbolize the bread and wine of the Holy Communion. A sheaf of wheat signifies life from death and growth due to the sun, God. The large supply of wheat represents abundance in the next world. One of the figures in *Summer, Ruth and Boaz,* drinks wine out of a skin. The transience of life is manifested in the cycle of

nature and the seasons. However, in accordance with the Gospel of John, salvation and eternal life are given to man in the body (bread/wheat/corn) and Blood (wine/grapes) of Christ:

> I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger. (John 6:35)

These ideas have antique precedents. For example, Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* cited from Euripides' lost tragedy of *Hipsipyle* the following well-known passage: "Earth must go back to earth: then life by all...like crops is harvested. So must it be."[65] Primitive vegetation rituals which associated "corn" with death and resurrection, found a poetical sublimation in Euripides. Later, the conception was absorbed by Stoic philosophers. We find it in Marcus Aurelius: "Our lives are reaped like the ripe ears of corn. And as one falls, another still is born."[66]

The influence of Stoic doctrines on the *Epistles* of St Paul and particularly on the central doctrine of resurrection as propounded in Corinthians I is well known.67 In Seneca's *Epistles* the preparation for death prevails. He returns constantly to the idea that death is the ever-present counterpart to life: "The very day which we are now spending is shared between ourselves and death."[68] It is not surprising that he was often looked upon as a Christian.

All four paintings in *The Four Seasons* are set within a valley, the zone of creation. In Christianity, it is the location of death as "The valley of the shadow of death." (Psalms 23:4) The castle and the mountains in the distance of *Summer, Ruth and Boaz*, represent the transcendent soul and the way to salvation. The lance which is held by a figure at the front of the picture plane, is symbolic of the Passion. Poussin's *Autumn, Spies with Grapes from the Promised Land*, is set at twilight, typifying maturity and the occasion of death. It is the end of a cycle for the sun is setting. The dryness represents immortality and spiritual life. Giants walk across this barren land. They are the primordial beings of the Old Testament by whose sacrifice creation was brought forth. The giant of the New Testament is Christ, who sacrificed Himself for humanity. The huge grapes carried by the Titans in *Autumn, The Spies with the Grapes from the Promised Land,* symbolize the blood of Christ. They can further be Christ Himself, Christ Incarnate in accordance with the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation as a result of which, during the Communion, the wine actually becomes the blood of Christ and the bread, the body of Christ or vice versa. The grape vines and leaves are emblematic of the Saviour as the true vine. The vine was also an attribute of Dionysus-Bacchus and was sacred to dying gods capable of resurrection. The relation between God and man through Christ is emphasized in the image of the ladder which appears to stem

directly from the grapes toward heaven. The vine also typifies the union of the terrestrial and celestial worlds, of man and God through Christ:

> I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing...Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.(John15:1,5,8)

The mixing of wine (blood of Christ) in the *Autumn, TheSpies with Grapes from the Promised Land*, with water in the *Winter, The Flood*, is symbolic of the human and the divine Christ at the Incarnation. Christ, the Son of God, Who shed His blood on the cross to redeem mankind for his sins, is presented directly to the viewer in the form of the grapes:

> And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to him saying, Drink ye all of it, this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matthew 26:27,28)

The grapes also depict Stoic wisdom "in vino veritas," referring, perhaps, to the knowledge of their true significance.

Apples, picked by the woman on the ladder in *Autumn, The Spies with the Grapes from the Promised Land*, are also pictured in the *Spring, Earthly Paradise*. They are emblematic of Christ in the New Testament, the new Adam. Allied with Christ they are the fruit of salvation. This is an allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon:

> As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. (Song of Solomon 2:3)

One of the giants carries three pomegranates that represent the Church on account of the inner unity of the countless seeds in one and the same fruit. More importantly, in pagan mythology, the pomegranate was the attribute of Proserpina in her periodical return to earth in Spring. From this pagan symbolism of the rejuvenation of the earth with Spring, the pomegranate, in Christian art, came to be interpreted as hope for immortality through resurrection This idea is central to Poussin's *The Four Seasons* in which Christ, the true vine, offers salvation to mankind through His death and resurrection. The three pomegranates in the painting are further significant since, according to Pythagoras, they are the beginning, the middle and the

end; in other words, they imply the cyclical process of nature.[68] They also signify the Trinity and the three days Christ spent in his tomb. Christ, the Word, the Logos, is reborn, illustrated in the form of the child and the ark, and salvation lies in the mountain ahead. Thus, the last painting - *Winter, The Flood*, is also the first. *The Four Seasons* have been read in a cyclical manner, beginning and ending with Christ:

> Who was the beginning, is now, and ever will be, world without end.

The colour green, which is prominent throughout the pictures, could indicate the triumph of life over death. In pagan rites green was the symbol of spiritual initiation. The grey-green of *Winter, The Flood*, suggests the death of the body and the immortality of the soul. Moreover, St John the Evangelist was often depicted wearing green, which underlines the pertinence of his Gospel to all four paintings.[70]

Poussin's *The Four Seasons* are charged with allusions to Classical and Biblical texts. The various elements in the pictures unite under the one theme of hope for resurrection. Poussin's Stoic despair at the fleeting passage of human existence was relieved to some extent by the expectation of afterlife, a typical Baroque transformation of Classical and Renaissance philosophy. Poussin depicts the redemption of man's sins in the Old Testament through the divinity of the New Testament, Christ, the Saviour.

In these paintings of *The Four Seasons,* Poussin provides answers to the prevalent questions of his age. Man, though mortal and no longer the centre of the universe, is promised eternal life through the Body and Blood of Christ. As the Stoics and early Fathers claimed, the answers lay in the cyclical process of nature itself. Man needed only to study the universe, as did the scientists of Poussin's day, in order to comprehend his own position and his relation to God. Manilius' famous and, since the fifteenth century, often quoted lines, are here appropriate: "Nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet."[71] (We die with birth, and the end depends upon the beginning.)

In a letter of March 1665, written to Fréart de Chambray six months prior to his death, Poussin defined painting in the following way: "C'est une imitation faite avec lignes et couleurs...de tout ce qui se voit dessouds le Soleil. Sa fin est la Délectation."[72] Poussin's leaning towards a form of Pantheism is evidenced by this letter in his emphasis on nature, rather than on man. He also refers here to the doctrine of delectation as the aim of his art. To St

Augustine *Delectatio* was that which delighted the soul, the first source being nature, which he considered to be the prime means of attaining union with the divine. This belief appears to have been shared by Poussin in his late landscapes, especially *The Four Seasons.*

CONCLUSION

Nicolas Poussin's *The Four Seasons* make a positive statement about Catholicism, though not necessarily about the Church authorities of his day. It would seem that a group as narrow in its tenets as the entourage of the Pope, might have appeared petty and uninformed to men of learning such as Poussin. In terms of patronage, Poussin's desire for recognition was minimal in comparison with his need for an enlightened and educated recipient of his paintings. Bernini's works are representative of the propagandistic art of Catholicism while Poussin's reflect a certain unrest amongst a number of Catholics of the age who were dissatisfied with the direction in which the Church was taking them. Hence Poussin's criticism of the Princes of the Church, their extravagant life-style, and their superstitions. Poussin and Bernini constitute what Giulio Carlo Argan summarized as: "Two distinct spiritual streams that flowed through the Catholic civilisation."[1] Poussin rarely wrote of religious matters in his correspondence, though his understanding of religious texts, their influences and derivations was profound and extensive.

Following the death of Cassiano dal Pozzo and Poussin's wife, and with his own encroaching illness, the artist became depressed. His obsession with death grew. Nevertheless, he was almost certainly aware of the Stoic view regarding the contemplation of and preparation for death as delineated by Seneca: "The mortal heart is never more divine than when it reflects on its own mortality and realizes that a man was born to consummate his life, and that his body is not a permanent place."[2] Poussin spoke of his own death in terms of art, its perfection, as an expression of the Self coming forth as death nears: "L'On dit que le cygne chante plus doucement lorsqu'il est voisin de sa mort. Je tacherai, à son imitation, de faire mieux que jamais."[3] *The Four Seasons* are Poussin's "swansong," revealing the deepest poetry of his soul.

On November 19, 1665 Poussin died. Dughet wrote of the event to Chantelou, stating: "Il est mort confort de tous les sacrements de l'Église, en parfait Chrétien et Catholique".[4] Poussin, as a devout Catholic requested the Benediction of the Church on his death bed. He was carried to the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, and there laid to rest.

Poussin's *The Four Seasons* emerge as "altarpieces," offering both him and the viewer the means of salvation, quite within the tradition of numerous Counter Reformatory altarpieces by artists such as Rubens and Caravaggio. His manner of presentation is, however, enigmatic, his

personal autograph lay beyond the bounds of the temporal Baroque Church, answering only to the very source of Catholicism in the early Fathers. Poussin followed Augustine's advice that the artist should: "Create a transparent sensory thing...through which an imitation of divine beauty discovered."[5]

NOTES

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15 Gabriele Zinano, *Il Sogno Overo della Poesia* (Reggio Emilia, 1590), pp.31-41.

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13 Nicolas Poussin, ibid, pp.278, 299, 366.

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22 Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p.56.

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CHAPTER II NOTES:

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Sauerländer in *Die Jahreszeiten, Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst, 3rd series, VII*, 1956, pp.169-184, refers to his links with the Jesuits, as does Vanuxem in *Les Jésuites et la Peinture au XVIIe siecle*, 1958, pp.85ff. Hibbard in *The Holy Family on the Steps* (Chatham: W & J Mackay Ltd, 1974), pp.43-47, presents certain possible Jansenist influences. Blunt in *Nicolas Poussin* (Washington D.C.: The Trustees of the National Gallery of Art, 1968), pp.208-218, discusses Poussin's connection with the *Libertins*.

2 Paul Fréart Sieur de Chantelou, *Voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France* (Paris: Ludovic Lalanne, 1885), p.127.

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4 Poussin was on one occasion attacked by Roman soldiers in Italy because his manner and appearance were so French. Such was the antipathy towards the French at the time. In Hess, ed., Die Kunstlerbiographien von Gio. B. Passeri, (Leipzig & Vienna, 1934), p.324.

5 Howard Hibbard presents a possible Jansenist interpretation of Poussin's The Holy Family on the Steps.

6 Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 9.1 & 16.2.

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Thomas Glen draws parallels between Old and New Testaments in his article on the *"Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well of 1648,"* Art Bulletin, LXVII, (June 1975), pp. 221 224. He states that, Poussin's Old Testament work should be compared with a New Testament painting of Guido Reni's, as both paintings were executed for the same patron, Pointel.

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17 Nicolas Poussin, op.cit., p.134.

18 Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp.107-108.

Richard Pintard, *Le Libertinage Erudit dans la première moitié du XVII siècle* (Paris, 1943), p.25.

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Richard Pintard, op.cit, p.251.

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[29] C.R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable,* ed. J. Mayne (London, 1951), p.327.

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54 D. Pearsall & E. Saller, op.cit, pp.56-75.

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CONCLUSION NOTES:

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2 H.B. Timothy, *The Tenets of Stoicism* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1973), p.59.

3 Nicolas Poussin, *Lettres et Propos sur l'Art* (Paris: Hermann, 1964), p.156.

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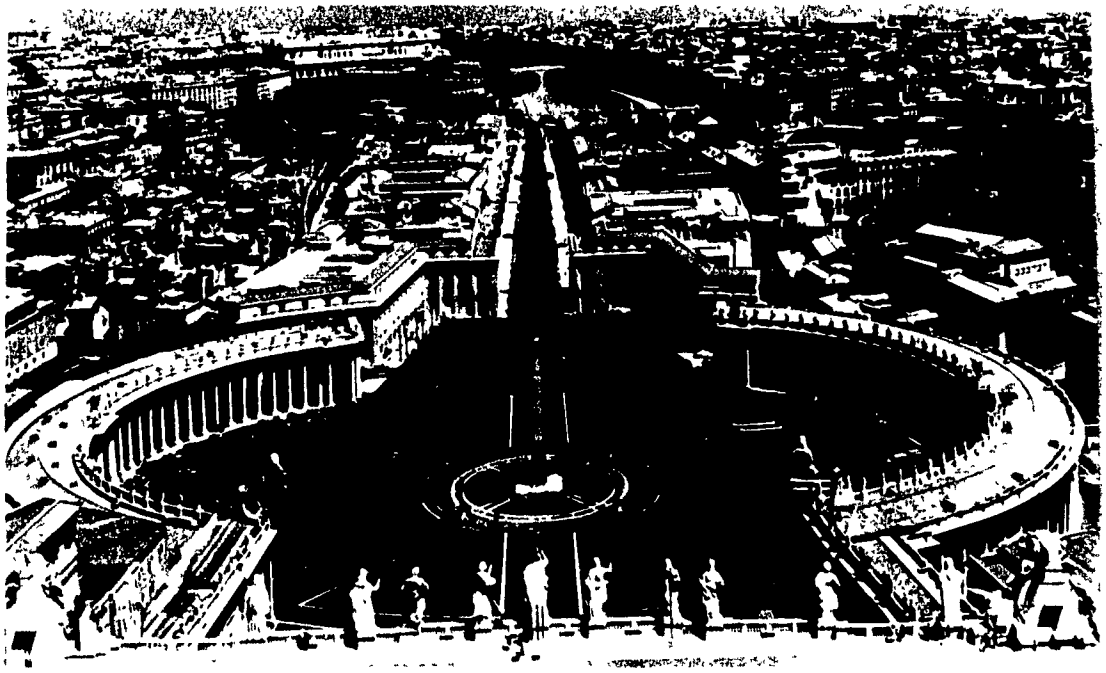

Fig 1 Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Plazza before St Peter s, Rome 1656-1667

Fig.2.a Nicolas Poussin, The Seven Sacraments Ordination, 1647

Fig.2.b. Nicolas Poussin, The Exposition of Moses, 1654

Fig 3 a Nicolas Poussin, Echo and Narcissus, 1627

Fig 3 b Paris Bordone, Pietà, 1525

Fig 4 a Nicolas Poussin, Venus with the Dead Adonis, 1627

Fig 4 b Nicolas Poussin, Lamentation over the Dead Christ, 1627

Fig 5 Nicolas Poussin, The Realm of Flora, 1636

Fig 6 Nicolas Poussin, Self-Portrait, 1649-1650

Fig 7 a Nicolas Poussin, Landscape with St Jerome, 1648

Fig 7 b Albrecht Altdorfer, Repentance of St Jerome, 1507

Fig 8 Nicolas Poussin, Landscape with Ashes of Phocion, 1648

Fig 9 Nicolas Poussin, Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe, 1651

Fig 10 Nicolas Poussin Et in Arcadia Ego, 1638

Fig 11 Nicolas Poussin, The Holy Family on Steps, 1655-1657

Fig 12 Nicolas Poussin, The Rape of Europa, 1640-1650, drawing

Fig 13 Nicolas Poussin, Landscape with two Nymphs and a Snake, 1659

Fig 14 Nicolas Poussin, Landscape with Polyphemus, 1649

Fig 15 Nicolas Poussin, The Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun, 1658

Fig 16 Nicolas Poussin, The Birth of Bacchus, 1657, drawing

Fig 17 Nicolas Poussin, Apollo and Daphne, 1664

Fig 18 a Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Winter, The Flood, 1660-1664

Fig 18 a Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Winter, The Flood, 1660-1664 (detail)

Fig 18 b Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Spring, The Earthly Paradise, 1660-1664

Fig 18 b Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Spring, The Earthly Paradise, 1660-1664 (detail)

Fig 18 c Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Summer, Ruth and Boaz, 1660-1664

Fig. 18 c Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons, Summer, Ruth and Boaz, 1660-1664 (detail)

Fig.18.d. Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Autumn, The Spies with the Grapes of the Promised Land, 1660-1664

Fig 18 d Nicolas Poussin, The Four Seasons Autumn, The Spies with the Grapes of the Promised Land, 1660-1664 (detail)

Fig. 19 Jean de Berri, The Brussels Hours. The Cycles of Christ's Life: Flight into Egypt, fourteenth century

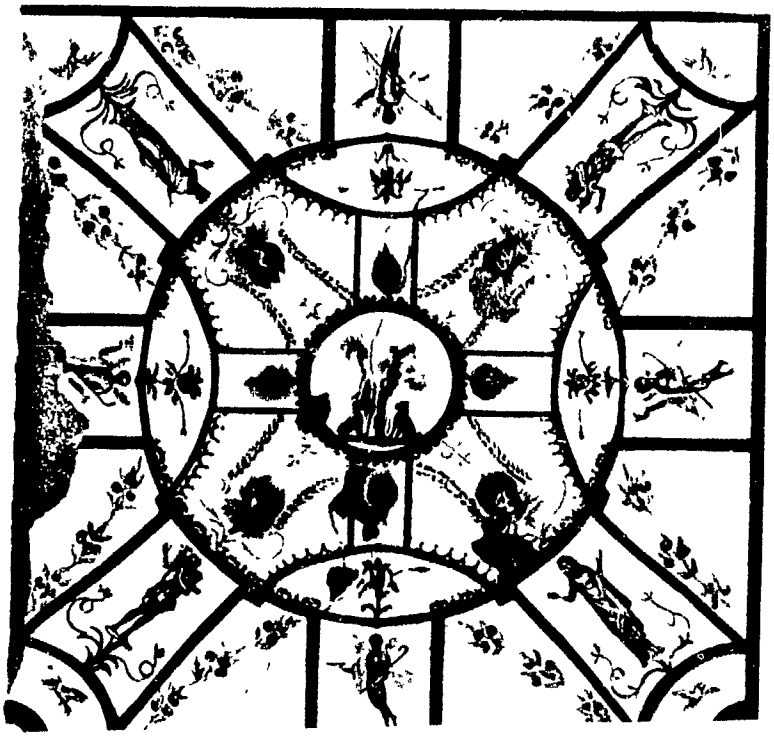

Fig 20 Daniel in the Lon's Den surrounded by the Seasons and the Good Shepherd and Orants, The Catacomb of St Callixtus, Rome, third century, fresco

Fig. 21. Nicolas Poussin, Putti with Chariot and Goats, 1626.