

Q: Why would artists depict religious events as though they took place in the contemporary world? Couldn't this have been seen as insulting to religion?

A: Artists in the Baroque period, particularly in the Italian Baroque, loved to depict religious stories as though they had happened in the contemporary world. (Baroque artists were not the first people to do this. In the Northern Renaissance, artists often painted religious scenes in a domestic setting, but these images were always dignified and adhered to certain conventions of decorum.) In the Baroque period, Caravaggio was famous for this. Think of his *Calling of Saint Matthew* and *Death of the Virgin*, both of which depict religious people and events in everyday, illustrate even squalid environments, and are peopled by figures that often look dirty and of ill repute. This method of bringing religious people and events down to Earth—down to our own level—was a very effective way of creating images to which ordinary people could relate. This in turn helped the cause of the Counter Reformation, which sought to bring more and more people into the Church. Of course, not everyone approved of these techniques and some did see this approach as insulting. Some church figures rejected this style, favoring the Carracci family, who carried on the more refined artistic conventions of Renaissance art.

Tags: [artistic styles](#), [Baroque](#), [Caravaggio](#), [The Carracci](#), [The Counter Reformation](#)