

Last Judgment

The Descent into Hell

The right-hand part of the fresco, underneath the celestial hierarchy, has a downward movement with the descent of the damned, who are tragically struck down by the divine curse and fall toward the jaws of Hades. It seems that the serpent biting the side of the damned soul who is covering up one eye alludes to the torment of remorse after sin. The damned cross the «woeful river» of Acheron on an overloaded boat steered by Charon, who stares fiercely at his passengers and threatens them with his oar. In his depiction of the ferrying of the souls, Michelangelo was certainly inspired by his reading of Dante and Tommaso di Celano. It seems that Charon was given the appearance of the Constable of Bourbon, the man who led the imperial troops in the attack on Rome in 1527, while Minos, Dante's judge of the damned, was depicted with the features of the papal master of ceremonies Biagio da Cesena, who had criticized the nudity in the *Judgment*. According to Dante's account, Minos handed out punishment by wrapping his tail round his body as many times as the number of circles of Hell that the sinner would have to descend.