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# THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SUBLIME





# WHAT IS THE SUBLIME?

LONGINUS

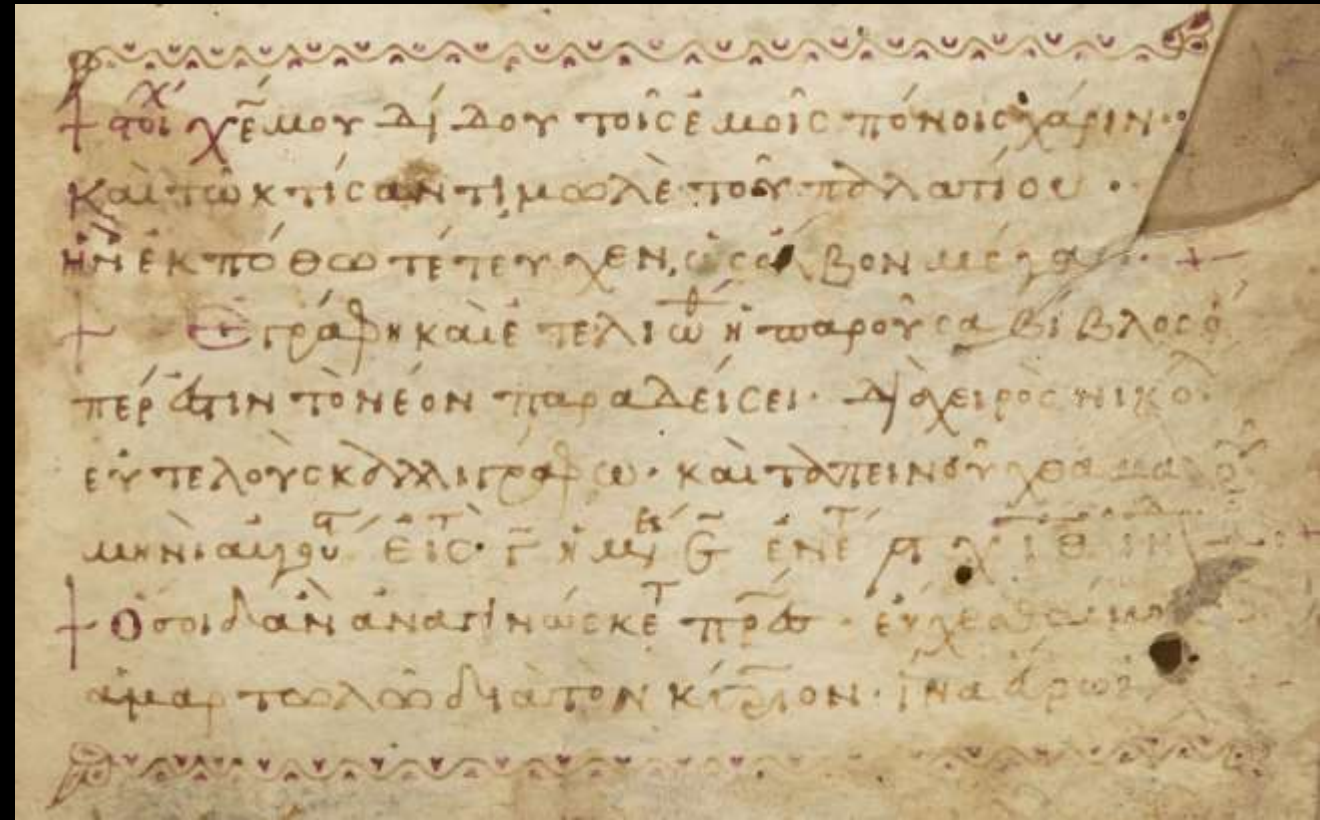


BURKE

# LONGINUS

Περὶ ὕψους 'On the Sublime' ca. 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD

One of the earliest  
treatises on Literary  
criticism, rhetoric,  
and the Sublime



The effect of elevated language upon an audience is **not persuasion but *transport***. At every time and in every way imposing speech, with the spell it throws over us, prevails over that which aims at persuasion and gratification. Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas *Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt*, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude. (1.4)



# THAT WHICH TRANSPORTS US OUT OF OURSELVES

NATURE / ART

'FLASHING FORTH'

'Sublimity is the echo of a great soul.' (9.2)

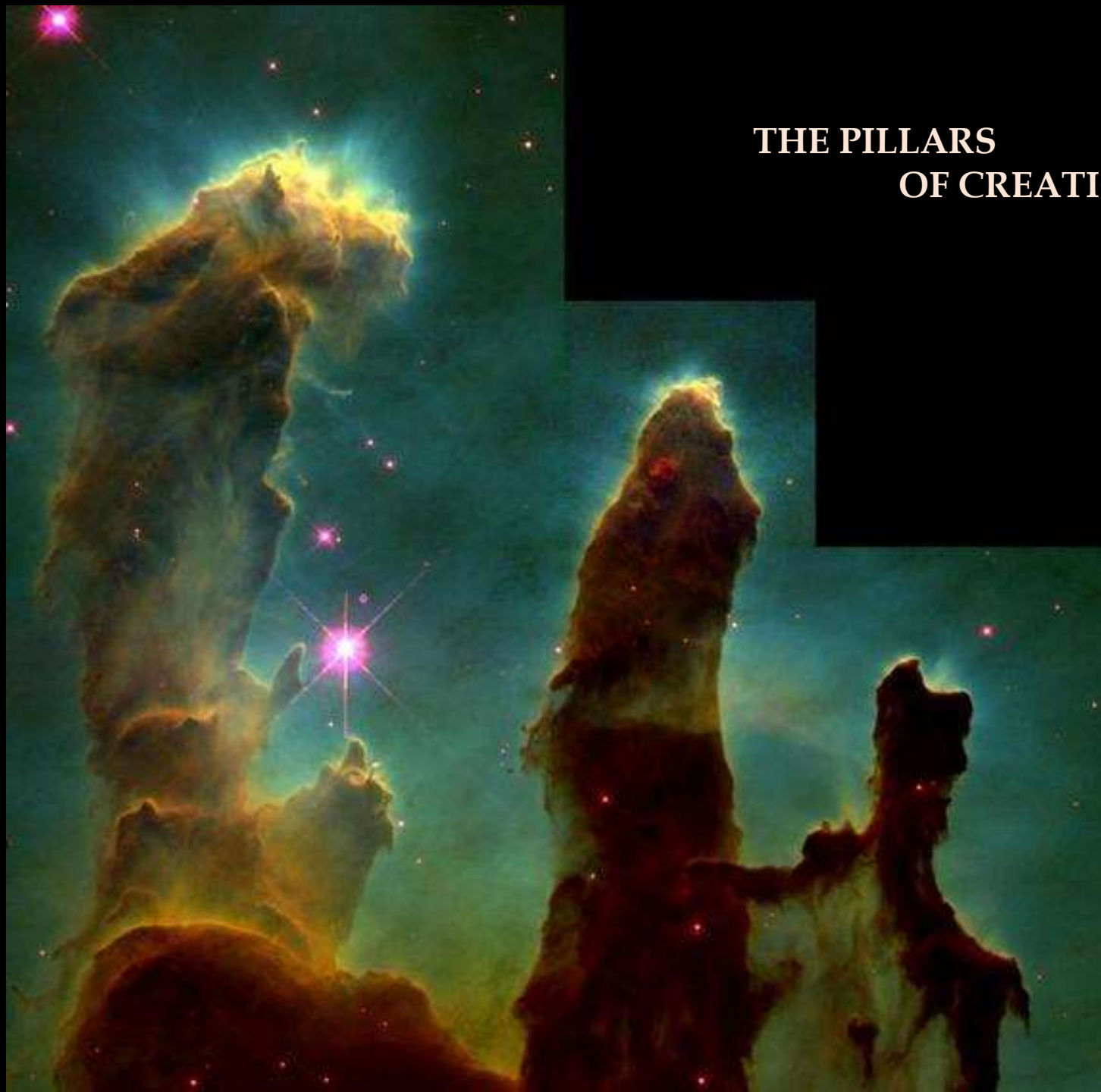








THE PILLARS  
OF CREATION



A similar effect was achieved by the lawgiver of the Jews — no mean genius, for he both understood and gave expression to the power of the divinity as it deserved — when he wrote at the very beginning of his laws, and I quote his words: "God said," — what was it? — "Let there be light, and there was. Let there be earth, and there was."

— On the Sublime 9.9



EDMUND BURKE  
'A Philosophical Enquiry into the  
Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime  
and Beautiful'  
1757



A  
Philosophical Enquiry  
INTO THE  
ORIGIN of our IDEAS  
OF THE  
S U B L I M E  
AND  
B E A U T I F U L.



L O N D O N :

Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY, in Pall-mall.  
M DCC LVII.

- **THE BEAUTIFUL:**  
PERFECTLY FORMED, AND  
AESTHETICALLY PLEASING --ATTRACTS (THE 'DAVID')
- **THE SUBLIME:**  
COMPELLING AND ABLE TO OVERWHELM AND DESTROY  
THE INFINITE AND THE SENSATION OF AWE  
TERROR AND HORROR *ATTRACTS/REPELS* (TORNADO)

**DREAD OF ANTICIPATION:** **Terror** is characterized by "obscurity" or indeterminacy in its treatment of potentially horrible events; it is this indeterminacy that leads the reader toward the sublime.

**PARALYSIS IN PRESENCE:** **Horror**, in contrast, "nearly annihilates" the reader's responsive capacity with its unambiguous displays of atrocity.

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is **Astonishment**; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that *far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.* **Astonishment**, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect.



# DISORIENTATION AND POETIC TRUTH

- THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS MADE—IN OUR FALLEN STATE WE ARE DISORIENTED
- DISORIENTATION IN THE FACE OF THE BEAUTIFUL
- DISORIENTATION IN SUBLIME TERROR
- DISORIENTATION IN SUBLIME HORROR



...Sublimity flashing forth  
at the right moment  
scatters everything  
before it  
like a thunderbolt...

GIORGIONE  
THE TEMPEST  
1506













**Las Meninas**  
**Diego Valezquez**  
**1656**





## Caravaggio 1597 Medusa

Gaspare Murtola (17th c.):

‘Fuggi, perché se i tuoi occhi  
sono pietrificata in stupore,  
Lei si trasformerà in pietra’

"Flee, for if your eyes are  
petrified in amazement,  
she will turn you to stone."

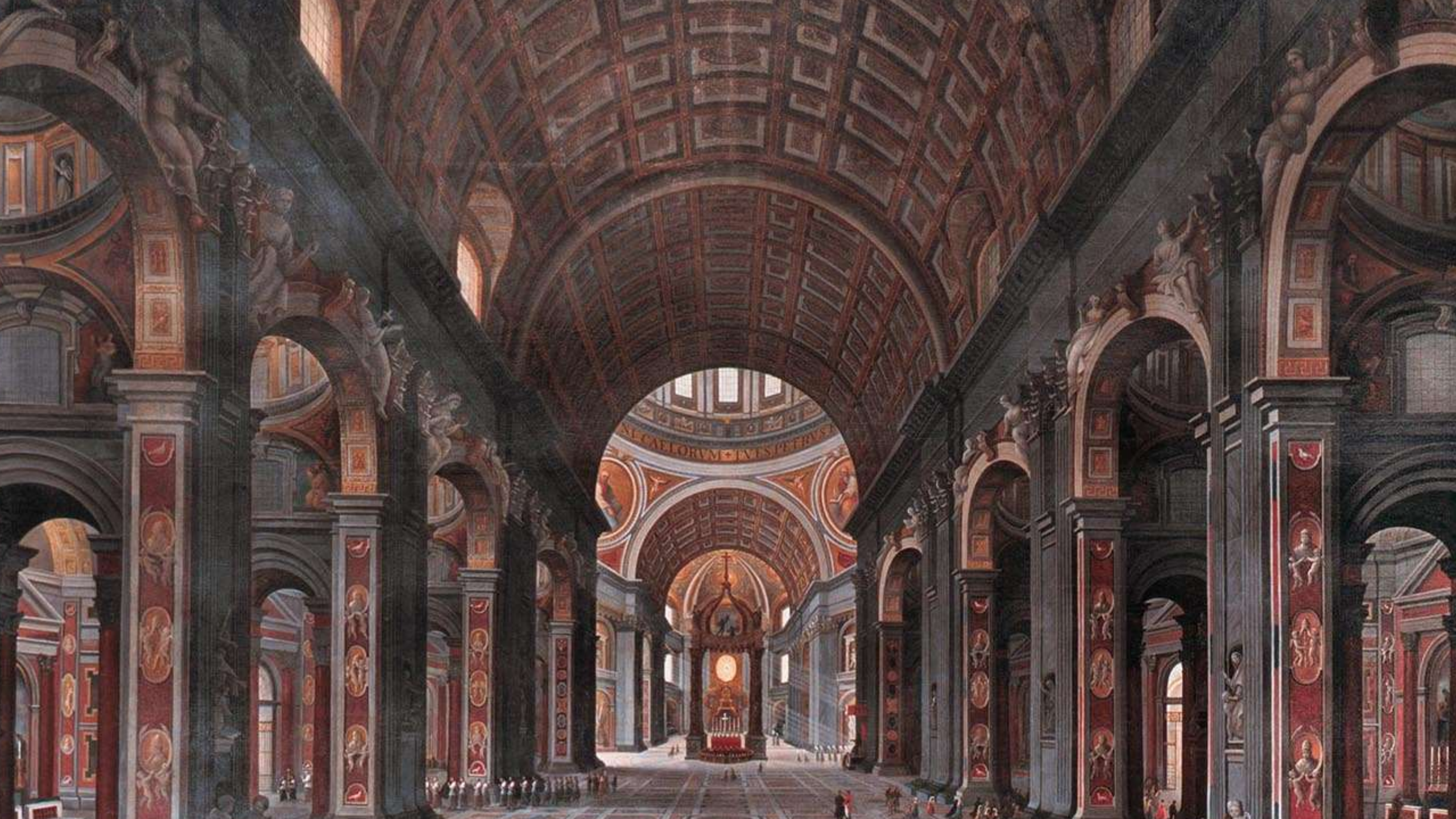
The Love Letter  
Jan Vermeer  
1666







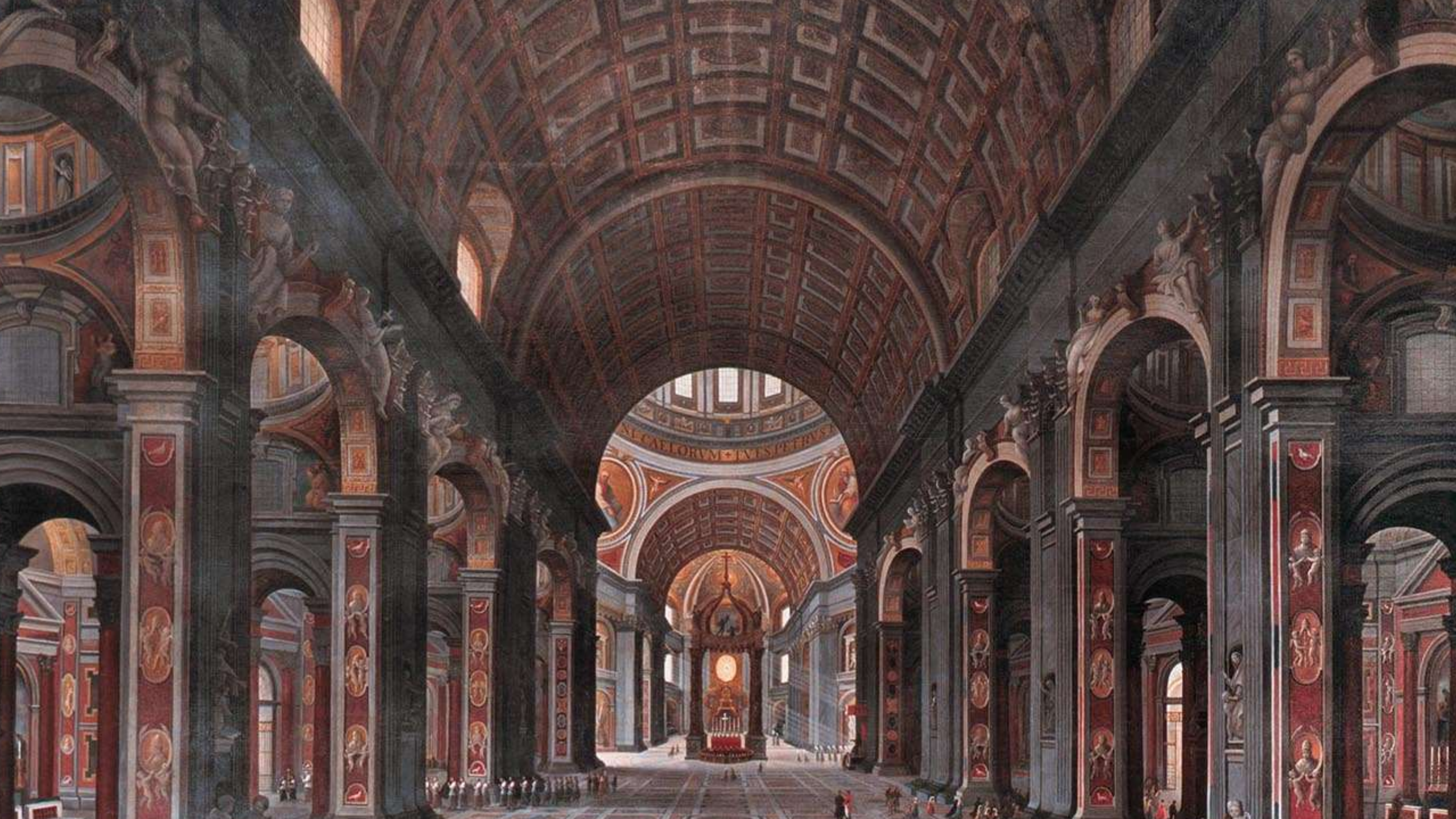


















*Irony, Aporia, Astonishment*  
*Disorientation*  
*EDUCERE*

These are theological experiences that  
transport you beyond yourself — self  
transport is a key moment in the  
apprehension of the Good, the True, the  
Beautiful, and ultimately,  
the God of all things

‘...the echo of a great soul...’

- MOST MODERN EDUCATION APPEARS TO BE DESIGNED TO PRODUCE STUDENTS WHO ARE AMBIVALENT, CYNICAL, DETACHED FROM A WORLD OF BEAUTY AND TRANSPORT
- TEACHERS AIM FOR CLARITY, TO END CONFUSION & DISORIENTATION. STOP IT.
- DEEPLY THEOLOGICAL...HUMBLING....