

THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS

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The School of

Athens by Raphael (1483-1520) is one of the greatest artistic masterpieces of the Renaissance. Here you see the two principal figures, Plato on the left and Aristotle on the right. It is a classic example of the picture worth a thousand words. Plato is pointing to the heavens and his imaginary world of Forms that didn't actually exist, while Aristotle has his outstretched hand towards the earth – cautioning Plato to pay attention to Reality. For only in the real world can Plato's ideals of Truth, Justice, and Virtue actually exist, expressed in concrete human action.

Raphael's masterpiece was commissioned by Pope Julius II for a room in the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican – just as Julius commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Apostolic Palace's Sistine Chapel at the same time! Raphael from 1509-1511, Michelangelo from 1508-1512.

While the Apostolic Palace is the official residence of the Pope, the part of it containing these masterpieces can be open to the public. It is one thing to see a photo of them, and quite another to contemplate them in person. Only then can you be appropriately overwhelmed by the superhuman genius it took to create them. (*Glimpses of Our Breathtaking World #257* photo ©Jack Wheeler)

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