

SAINT PHILIP NERI AND SANTA MARIA IN VALLICELLA

Joseph Connors



The "twin" façades: Santa Maria in Vallicella on the right and Borromini's oratory façade to the left

Thomas Gordon Smith was a practicing architect who rose to become dean of the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. He was what one might call a "creative classicist." In his built work, imagination is in dialogue with tradition.

This was the basis of our shared love of Francesco Borromini (1599-1667), the architect of seventeenth-century Rome who pioneered the new Baroque style. Though he was ever alert to the architecture of antiquity he could also boast, "I would never have entered this profession only to become a copyist."

Thomas and I often looked admiringly together at Borromini's celebrated early work, the oratory of the Filippini (followers of Saint Philip Neri). For this tribute, however, I am moving back a generation from the oratory in the full Baroque style to the church of Santa Maria in Vallicella next to it, a monument of the Counter-Reformation.

The star of the narrative is not an ar-

chitect but a charismatic saint. Vibrant Catholic that he was, Thomas would have been delighted that readers of *Sacred Architecture* are spending time with this loveliest of all the Renaissance and Baroque churches in Rome.

The "Twin" Façades

A piazza on the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, the busy modern thoroughfare that swerves through the Campus Martius on its way to the Vatican, allows a generous view of the "twin" façades of the oratory and the church. The situation was not always so spacious. For the first decades of its existence the church was hemmed in by older houses.

Eventually it was surrounded by the enormous residence of the Filippini. This casa included a smaller liturgical space called an oratory, built from 1637-1641. The architect, Borromini, decided that the oratory deserved a

façade of its own. We see it to the left of the church. Subtly curved and enriched with imaginative detail, this creates the impression of a double or twin façade. The juxtaposition between the two is like a conversation across generations.

Here, however, I would like to dwell on the senior interlocutor, the church. I see it as an expression of the piety of the future saint, the devotion of his followers, and the taste of the patrons he was able to attract.

The Saint

Philip Neri was born in 1515 into a Florentine family with noble roots but in straitened circumstances. His father was a follower of the Dominican firebrand, Girolamo Savonarola. Philip would inherit this allegiance, although his spirituality would be gentler and more humane.

He arrived in Rome as a pious young man and took to praying alone at night

in the catacombs, then still unexplored and ghostly. A mystical experience there in 1544 aroused such fervor that his heart was expanded. This was confirmed years later in an autopsy. After his canonization in 1622 (he had died in 1595), the flaming heart combined with the stars of his night vision and the lilies of his legendary chastity would become his emblems.

In a few years Philip turned to a more urban apostolate. He labored with the confraternity of the Trinità dei Pellegrini to accommodate the influx of pilgrims arriving for the Holy Year of 1550. He was ordained in 1551 at the age of thirty-six. He moved to San Girolamo della Carità on the Via Monserrato, then an abandoned monastery and not yet the handsome Baroque church it is today.

As “the magnet that draws iron,” Philip attracted young men from the courts of the cardinals’ palaces in the area. To fill their idle afternoons he began the devotional practice that eventually became known as the Oratory. This consisted of sermons delivered by his young followers in an informal style, often on church history. Scholastic theology and high-flown rhetoric were forbidden. The language was simple and direct, timed to the half-hour by the glass. The devotion might conclude with the singing of a simple *laude* in the Savonarola tradition, where song was a form of prayer and tears a sign of inner conversion.

Though the devotion started small, a gala Sunday version eventually drew large crowds including women and children. Foreigners noted that the purity of language made this a good place to learn Italian.

Scholarship and Music

In 1563-1564 Philip was named rector of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini on the Via Giulia. Although the church itself would not be finished for another century, as the seat of the Florentine community in Rome its rectorship carried great prestige. Philip’s circle of followers now included men like Francesco Maria Tarugi, scion of a noble family from Montepulciano in Tuscany and eventually a cardinal.

Cesare Baronio, a humorless, deeply pious young man from Sora in the Kingdom of Naples, began research into the origins of the Roman Church. Philip imposed domestic duties on



The miraculous fresco of the Virgin and Child with a copper crescent moon added by Cesare Baronio

Baronio to teach him humility. Grafitti found in the residence mention “Baronio the perpetual cook.”

But his work would eventually blossom into the greatest scholarly enterprise of the Catholic Reformation, the *Annales Ecclesiastici*, published in twelve folio volumes from 1588 to 1607. He was made a cardinal and appointed Vatican librarian in 1596. He would be a major force in shaping the church.

During carnival, the oratory became a competitor to the operas staged in palaces and a substitute for them in Lent. Solo singers alternated with a chorus of four to six voices to supplement the short sermons. Singers were often recruited from the Cappella Sistina, the pope’s own choir. The music approached a professional level and the accompaniment could include violins, horns, lutes, harps, and a portable organ.

Among his friends Philip numbered the great composer, Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina. Though not a musician himself, Philip deserves his reputation as the musical saint of the Counter-Reformation.

The Icon

Santa Maria in Vallicella went through many changes in patron, architect, and plan on its way to grandeur. In 1575, Pope Gregory XIII gave the fledgling community around Philip an ancient church in the heart of the

Campus Martius. Its double dedication was to the Virgin and Pope Saint Gregory. The structure was dilapidated and the neighborhood chancy.

As the name “vallicella” (“little valley”) suggests, the church occupied a depression in ground level. The church floor, set lower still, was easily submerged by Tiber flooding. A *stufa* or bathhouse stood behind the apse. In an age when cleanliness did not stand next to godliness the *stufa* stank of ill-repute.

A fifteenth-century fresco of the Virgin and Child painted on a wall in a narrow alley here came to life in 1535 when struck by a desperate man. Drops of blood appeared on her face, crowds gathered, and the miracle culminated in the lynching of the offender. The image was detached along with a slab of wall and installed in the old church.

When Philip and his followers took over the church forty years later, they made the image their emblem. Baronio attached a copper crescent moon below the Madonna, turning it from a *hodogetria*, a Byzantine type meaning “She who points the way,” into an Immaculate Conception.

Typical Church

The typical Counter-Reformation church is an assembly of parts: façade, nave with side chapels, transepts, crossing with cupola, apse. All could be built in separate campaigns and paid for by separate patrons. Changes of architect and design often happened, but seldom with as much improvisation as at the Vallicella.

In 1575, the builders laid the foundation of the right side of the new church over the foundations of the right side of the old. When deciding where to place the foundations on the left side, however, Philip’s ambition grew. “Make it wider” (“*Allargate più*”), he said to the surveyor three times. The trench eventually dug along this last line hit a massive Roman wall that could serve as the foundation for an extremely wide nave.

This gift from the ancient world was considered a sign of divine favor. The nave as finished in 1577 was a huge box closed in front by a brick wall, in back by wooden planks, and on top with a wood ceiling. There were two chapels on each side, eventually increased to five.

From 1586-1591, the architect



Photo: J. Connors

Detail of the Madonna della Vallicella and inscription above the main entrance

Martino Longhi the Elder enlarged the side chapels, gave the nave a barrel vault, and built the transept and apse. One gets the impression of a space under constant pressure from within, forcing tribune, transepts and chapels further out into a dense, doomed neighborhood.

Other new religious orders took care to orient their churches to major thoroughfares. The Jesuits built the Gesù facing a busy intersection. The Theatines built Sant'Andrea della Valle on a piazza facing the Via Papale. Modern visitors to Rome note how easy it is to find these churches. On the other hand, Philip thought of his new church as a re-incarnation of the medieval basilica. Hence, it was destined to face not a major artery but the backwater of the "little valley."

Hemmed in by older houses, it was

an uphill struggle to give the church a strong urban presence. Yet this was exactly the ambition of a pair of wealthy brothers from a clan close to Philip Neri.

The Façade

Cardinal Pier Donato Cesi patronized the grand expansion of the church from 1578 to 1586 and planned a façade. Although he died in 1586 before it could be begun he transmitted the obligation to build it to his younger brother, Angelo Cesi, the Bishop of Todi.

As readers of the Bible, the brothers knew of the Old Testament rule (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) that obliged a younger brother to marry the widow of his deceased older brother if she were still childless. This practice, called

by anthropologists the levirate, might seem obscure to us but it was widely known in the Renaissance. Henry Tudor of England, for example, felt obliged to take the widow of his older brother, Arthur, as his wife since that is what the Bible seemed to dictate. When he became Henry the Eighth she became Queen Catherine.

Angelo Cesi was initially reluctant to take on the financial burden of the façade, but when he accepted it in 1593 he cited this Old Testament rule. He imposed his own architect, however, a minor figure called Fausto Rughesi. He ordered drawings and a wood model that still exists. This helped Saint Philip visualize the façade before he died in 1595.

The façade was finally built between 1604 and 1605. If Longhi had found the church not wide or long enough, Rughesi found it not high enough. His façade towers over the nave, a champion in the wave of façadism that swept over Rome in these years.

Typically, the great façades of Rome exhibit the coat of arms of their main benefactor. Many of these were sadly defaced in a wave of iconoclasm that swept over Rome during the Jacobin Republic of 1798 to 1799, when the French Revolution reached Rome. The visitor to Rome who looks at façades with binoculars will find dozens of examples of family arms with their surfaces chipped into illegibility, even when they are high up and defacing them involved considerable effort.

The Cesi arms occupy the pediment of the Vallicella. The shield, now chiseled smooth, once had six peaks (*monti*) surmounted by a verdant tree, such as we find inside the church. The special hat of the higher clergy with six tassels hanging on each side, called a galero, has not been entirely chipped away.

These were always color-coded, red for cardinals and green for bishops. Since the hat on the façade was carved from white marble it could be creatively ambiguous, standing for either Cardinal Pier Donato Cesi or Bishop Angelo Cesi, or better, for Angelo as bishop for the moment but also as cardinal, should the pope choose to elevate him to that rank (which never happened).

The widow, as one might think of the façade, was proud of both her husbands. Of course, as the one who finished the façade, it was Angelo Cesi, "EPISC[OPUS] TUDERTINUS"

(Bishop of Todi), who got to put his name on it in large letters along with the date 1605.

Cesare Baronio, now a cardinal, had the satisfaction of seeing the façade finished before his death in 1607. It was a worthy frontispiece to the great book of devotion that opened up inside the church. It featured statues of the Latin Fathers closest to his heart, Jerome and Gregory the Great. Jerome was an early explorer of the catacombs and Gregory not only the dedicatee of the earlier church but also the hero of the second book of the *Annales*.

An inscription over the main door, “DEIPARAE VIRGINI,” reflects the cardinal’s (and Saint Philip’s) devotion to the Theotokos. Those over the side doors, “TOTA PULCHRA ES AMICA MEA” and “ET MACULA NON EST IN TE (Canticles 4:7-8) reflect an emphasis on the Immaculate Conception.

All this is summed up in the huge, three-dimensional icon in the center. Here, the Madonna della Vallicella floats on cherub-filled clouds while revered by a pair of angels. The green copper aureole around the Madonna was probably gilt.

By way of comparison, the Jesuits expended much gold on the aureole (now gone) around their shield with IHS on the façade of the Gesù. This was a theological abstraction, far less personal than the Virgin and Child that glinted in the afternoon sun at the Vallicella.

The Icon at the High Altar

Inside the church, the chapels were given to private patrons with the stipulation that the altarpieces were to follow a predetermined program. Each would show a mystery of a (somewhat abbreviated) rosary.

The plan was to start with the *Nativity of the Virgin* over the high altar. Then, proceeding counter-clockwise, they would continue down the chapels on the gospel side with the *Presentation of the Virgin* in the left transept (the Cesi family chapel), followed by the *Annunciation*, *Visitation*, *Nativity*, *Three Kings* and—for the moment—the icon of the Vallicella installed in the chapel closest to the façade.

The series would continue on the epistle side with the *Crucifixion*, *Deposition*, *Ascension*, *Pentecost*, and *Assumption*, ending with the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the right transept.



The main altarpiece of Santa Maria in Vallicella with a copy of the miraculous Madonna covering the original.

This neat scheme was disrupted by two powerful forces: relics and money. A friend of the Congregation, Cardinal Agostino Cusano, found the relics of five martyrs under the floor of his titular church, Sant’Adriano on the Roman Forum. Two were legionaries martyred under Diocletian (AD 284-305), Papianus and Maurus. The other three consisted of Flavia Domitilla, a princess of the Flavian period (AD 69-96), and her servants Nereus and Achilles.

Cardinal Baronio conceived the idea of packaging all five together with Pope Saint Gregory as the high altarpiece. Somehow the venerable old icon of the Madonna della Vallicella would be included among them. This made for a strange *sacra conversazione* (holy colloquy) of saints from the first, third,

and sixth centuries. Bookish scholar that he was, Baronio conceived of the altarpiece as a spectacular title page and rather liked these leaps across the centuries.

Rubens’ Opportunity

Then the money arrived. Out of the blue a wealthy Genoese financier, Giacomo Serra, agreed to pay for the altarpiece, provided that it was done by his young Flemish protégé, Peter Paul Rubens. Rubens was technically in the service of the Duke of Mantua, but was allowed generous periods of study in Rome.

He put all six characters together in a wonderful painting on canvas. He claimed that it was the best he had ever done. It was delivered in the summer



Photo: wikimedia.org/iticoandronico2013

Interior of Santa Maria in Vallicella

of 1607, while the artist was away in Genoa. But the painting was never to be installed in the Vallicella.

"It did not please" was the explanation that went about. Scholars have jumped to the conclusion that this was a rejection by the Oratorians, similar to Caravaggio's rejections by a number of his patrons. On the contrary, the party that the first painting did not please was Rubens himself.

Back in Rome that autumn, he saw an opportunity. While he was away in Genoa Baronio had died. With this authoritarian figure no longer looking over his shoulder, Rubens felt liberated. He was freed from the concept of a colored title page. With the somewhat flimsy excuse that the light in the apse was unfavorable for a painting on canvas, he took his first painting back and proposed a new altarpiece on slate, as though on a giant blackboard.

In the end Rubens produced three paintings on slate. Those at the sides accommodated the five martyrs plus Saint Gregory. That in the center was reserved for the icon of the Vallicella adored by choirs of angels. On ordinary days the faithful would see a Rubens

copy of the icon on tin. But on special feasts the copy would be lowered behind the slate by a special apparatus of ropes and pulleys. The original miraculous icon would suddenly appear.

Wonderfully, the Madonna had returned to the spot that she had originally occupied on a house wall near the *stufa*. On these rare occasions pilgrims, and we too if we arrive on the right day, stand in awe at the apotheosis of a humble image. Primitive by the sophisticated standards of Baroque Rome, it nevertheless exerts a totemic power that no work of modern art, however elegant, could match.

Sacred Theater

Through all the vicissitudes that came with the arrival of a new secular power, the Kingdom of Italy, in 1870, Oratorians remain at Santa Maria in Vallicella. Their gracious house, the *casa dei Filippini*, was subject to expropriation and is now given over to civic functions like the Capitoline archive, two public libraries, and a learned society.

The *padri* occupy a small wing

behind the apse of the church. They still officiate in the Vallicella with their famous dedication to liturgical purity.

On festive days they can offer a rare experience to the visitor by opening the central door in Cesi's great façade. Through it the faithful in the street can glimpse the Rubens altarpiece in the distance.

The mechanism for revealing the old icon can offer a moment of sacred theater. These occasions are rare. Day and night, however, the great sculptural icon at the center of the façade presides over the little valley that was the Madonna's neighborhood for many years before she welcomed Saint Philip and his followers to it.



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MOTHER CHURCH OF THE THEATINES: SANT' ANDREA DELLA VALLE

Joseph Connors

In the Fall 2021 issue of *Sacred Architecture*, I looked at Santa Maria in Vallicella, the most innovative of the Counter-Reformation basilicas in artistic terms. Now I want to look at Sant' Andrea della Valle, the grandest of this type in terms of architecture. It is the mother church of the Theatines, an austere reformed order of preachers founded in 1524 by Gian Pietro Caraffa and Gaetano dei Conti di Thiene. Since Caraffa was Bishop of Chieti (in Roman times Theate) in the Abruzzi, the order took the name Theatini. This was the first of the new sixteenth-century religious orders to be founded and served as the model for many others.

Their goal of apostolic service made them search for homes in urban centers. Like the Jesuits, the order had global ambitions and one can find the imprint of Sant' Andrea della Valle on churches as far as Sicily, Spain, Germany, and India.

Sant' Andrea della Valle is free-standing on three sides, a rarity in this densely built-up quarter. From neighboring rooftops it looks like a great ship sailing above the city. Like many churches of the Counter-Reformation, Sant' Andrea della Valle is a congeries of separable parts: façade, nave, transept, cupola, presbytery, apse.

A closer look at the exterior reveals much about the interior. The nave is flanked by chapels on each side, three to a side, each lit by a semi-circular window. The blank attic above them is at first puzzling until we realize that it hides the small cupolas over the chapels.

The buttresses that rise up between the chapels tell us that the nave is vaulted. The size of the buttresses tell us that the vault will be massive but the large windows between them tell us that the nave will be well lit. The transept is enormous. Each end is pierced by a generous window, looking east or west. The cupola is a masterpiece of Carlo Maderno, the architect who finished Saint Peter's with a nave and façade a decade earlier. A great engineering feat, it is a reduced version of the cupola of Saint Peter's.



Sant' Andrea della Valle, Rome

More than any other part of the church, it embodied what we might call the brand of the Theatines.

The interchangeable parts that make up the typical Counter-Reformation basilica are familiar standbys. Old Saint Peter's had a huge transept, almost like a separate building. Many Roman churches imitate it. Side chapels are present in medieval mendicant churches, like the Franciscan basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Capitoline Hill. Domes are a feature of fifteenth-century churches like Santa Maria della Pace or Santa Maria del Popolo, all willed into being by the builder of the Sistine Chapel, Pope Sixtus IV (ruled 1471-84). The travertine façade first makes an appearance in Rome under the same pope, when a wealthy French cardinal,

Guillaume d'Estouteville, put an expensive two-story façade on his titular church, Sant' Agostino.

The Counter-Reformation basilica, then, invents nothing new but puts familiar parts together in a new way. Plans of these churches resemble one another. They have the compactness of a printed circuit on a silicon chip. The first architect to use such a plan was the great Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola in the church of the Gesù. With some modifications, like deeper chapels or a higher nave, this is the plan of Sant' Andrea della Valle as well.

What we have intuited by looking at the exterior can now be seen when we enter the church. The nave, a glorious space for preaching, is seamlessly melded with the transept and presbytery, where the higher liturgy takes



Sant' Andrea della Valle from the south



Interior of Sant' Andrea della Valle

place. Previous churches put single (or at the Gesù double) pilasters between the arches. Here pilasters are combined in bundles that rise up to the vault like graceful athletes. Chapels for private worship and family burials are both part of the nave and at the same time separate spaces. Diversity and unity find their ideal expression in such a plan.

Genesis

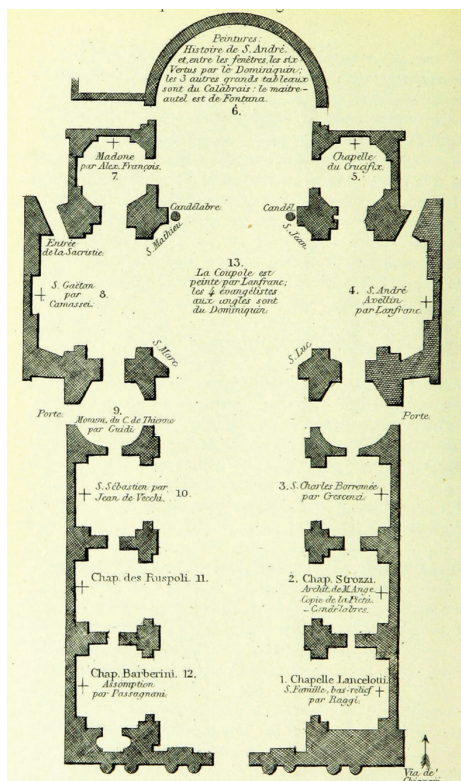
How did all this come about? The Theatines already had a small church on the Quirinal hill but wanted to establish a foothold in the heart of old Rome. In their search for a site they were aided by a bequest not of cash but of property. Costanza Piccolomini d' Aragona, Duchess of Amalfi and the last member of the Roman branch of the Sienese family that had produced two popes, Pius II (ruled 1458-64) and Pius III (ruled just 26 days in 1503), left them the palace in her will.

The palace was pulled down in the late 1610s to make the crossing and presbytery of the new church. Luckily, a view-map of 1593 gives us a precious glimpse of it. Palazzo Piccolomini was a stately edifice, similar in its crenellations and croisée windows to the famous Palazzo Venezia.

When it came to naming their church, the Theatines paid their benefactress back by opting for Saint Andrew, the patron saint of Amalfi. The locator, della Valle, derives from the presence of the venerable Roman family of this name in the immediate neighborhood.

As so often in Rome, older buildings shaped the new. Palazzo Piccolomini fronted on the Piazza di Siena, a rare open space in this crowded district. When construction began in 1603 foundations were sunk in the empty space of the piazza. Before the expense of demolishing the older houses there was only room here for four chapels, two per side.

The plan by the Theatine architect Francesco Grimaldi, revised by the Roman architect Giacomo Della Porta, looks at first like a copy of the Gesù. But it is really a corrected Gesù. The nave is taller in relation to the width. The chapels too are wider, higher and better lit than the chapels of the Gesù. This appealed to wealthy families. As soon as the Theatines put the chapels



Plan of Sant' Andrea

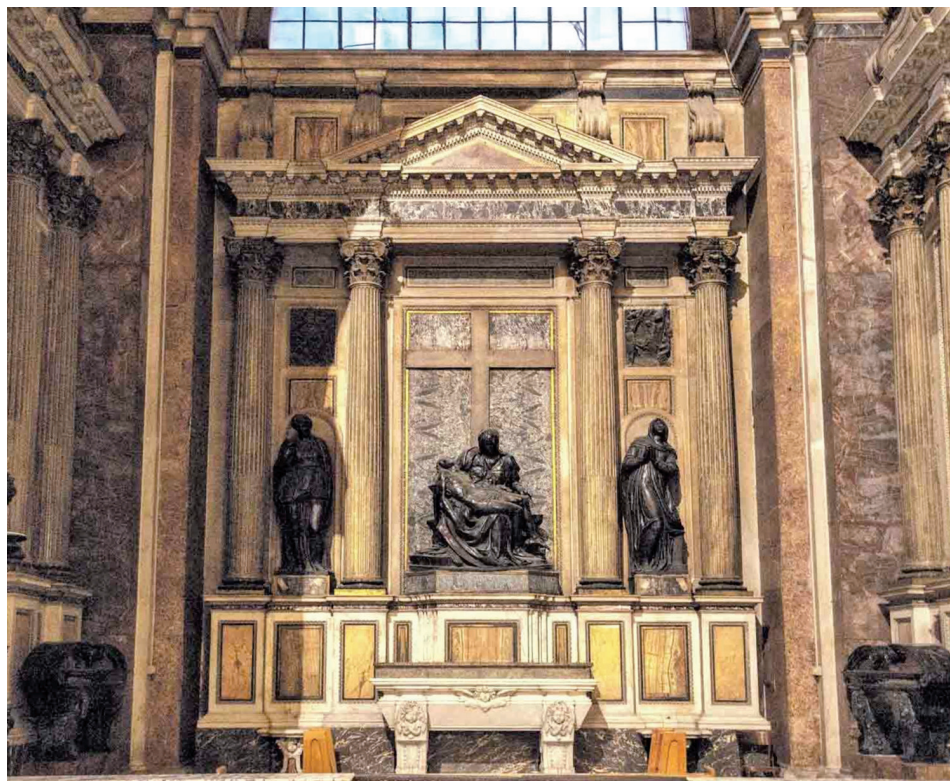


Image: Rome et ses Monuments, 1866. Public Domain

Photo: Roma non per tutti/Barbara Koloska

The Strozzi Chapel with a bronze replica of Michaelangelo's Vatican Pietà

on offer they were snapped up with a frenzy like the IPO of a hot tech stock.

First Chapels

The three families who took the first chapels were all Tuscan and were connected by ties of friendship. Orazio Rucellai bid first in 1603, Maffeo Barberini second in 1604, and Leone Strozzi third in 1605. As opposed to the strict control that the Jesuits and Oratorians exercised over the patrons of their chapels, the Theatines gave their patrons *carte blanche*. They simply had to guarantee to use abundant colored marble and not put the family arms outside the private space of the chapel. In return, they were free to choose their artists and their iconography. When it came to spending, they went to town.

Orazio Rucellai, the first to claim a chapel (second on the left), was enormously rich and could afford to spend 10,000 scudi on his jewel box. It remains one of the finest collections of precious marbles in Rome, which by definition meant ancient stones recycled from excavations. Rucellai set the tone for the Barberini, who followed him within the year. The Barberini brothers Carlo and Maffeo (the future

Pope Urban VIII) resorted to a Jesuit advisor who promoted the Immaculate Conception, which became the overarching theme of stunning paintings by the Tuscan painter, Domenico Passignano. Maffeo Barberini picked sculptors close to the family, especially the Tuscans Francesco Mochi and Pietro Bernini, the father of the great Gianlorenzo Bernini, whose adolescent hand has been found in some of the putti.

Rucellai and Barberini embraced the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art, where all the media—canvas altarpiece, oil on wall, fresco, gilt stucco, sculpture in white marble, portraits in porphyry and various colored marbles—everywhere work in concert. Across the aisle, however, a still wealthier patron chose to leave pictorial media behind.

For Leone Strozzi neither frescoes nor an altarpiece on canvas would be expensive enough. Strozzi was immensely proud of his family connection with Michelangelo. After recovering from an illness in the house of Leone's father, Roberto Strozzi, Michelangelo gave his host two Slaves from the Julius tomb (those now in the Louvre). Leone made the chapel an homage to Michelangelo. The only

works of figurative art are bronze copies after the master: the Vatican *Pietà* and the Leah and Rachel of the tomb of Julius II in San Pietro in Vincoli. The black sarcophagi (copied from Michelangelo's Medici Chapel in Florence), the patinated bronze and dark marbles make for a very dark chapel. Strozzi's goal was not art for appreciation but art for eternity. There is nothing here that time could erode.

The New Patron: Cardinal Montalto

When I enter Sant' Andrea della Valle I walk past the first two chapels on either side and then stop. Here I try to imagine the massive façade of Palazzo Piccolomini looming above me, as it did while the chapels were being built. Before they could demolish it the Theatines had to find a major donor. Fortunately, in 1608 the most promising patron possible came to their aid. Alessandro Damasceni Peretti, Cardinal Montalto (1571-1623), is one of the most interesting patrons of the period and probably the richest. Born in modest circumstances, he was fourteen when his grand-uncle was elected Pope Sixtus V in 1585, fifteen when made a cardinal and eighteen when promoted to vice-chancellor, the most



Photo: Author

The dome of Sant' Andrea by Carlo Maderno, with lantern by Francesco Borromini

lucrative post the curia had to offer.

Cardinal Montalto lived with his brother in the Cancelleria palace where they held something like a Renaissance court, famous for theatrical spectacles during carnival. He was also a patron of music. One of his contemporaries, the wealthy nobleman Vincenzo Giustiniani, describes him as a man of martial appearance and a scratchy voice (*una voce da scrivere*) who nevertheless sang and played with grace. The florid and sentimental style he introduced called for boys' voices and *castrati*. We are in the world of Caravaggio's concerts.

The cardinal inherited the famous villa of Sixtus V near Santa Maria

Maggiore. Although the central casino was already built the cardinal expanded the grounds enormously and enriched the gardens. He built a sunken pool with water from Sixtus V's aqueduct. When it was finished, he had the brilliant idea of asking the young Gianlorenzo Bernini to sculpt a statue of Neptune and Triton to stand over it. The figures seem to calm the angry waves. This was the first time Bernini looked beyond an individual sculpture group to the larger natural environment. Cardinal Montalto opened horizons that the young sculptor had not glimpsed before. Incidentally, Villa Montalto had pens for lions, living counterparts of the heraldic lions we

see scattered throughout Sant' Andrea della Valle.

The Cupola

Montalto's fortune allowed Maderno to build the transept and crown it with a cupola in 1619-23. It is one of the magnificent ornaments of the Roman skyline. Saint Peter's is of course the model, but with modifications. There are eight pairs of columns girding Maderno's drum, not sixteen as in Saint Peter's. Michelangelo's cupola is made up of an inner and an outer shell, as anyone who has climbed it knows. Circular windows light the space between the shells. Maderno placed similar windows around the dome, but since the cupola consists of a single shell, they are blind. The illusion would have been more convincing when their plastered surface was painted to imitate glass.

During construction in 1623 Maderno had the assistance of a young relative from the Swiss lakes named Francesco Castelli. Though little more than twenty, he was already a superb draftsman and a daring designer. The drawings we have for Sant' Andrea are mostly in his hand. When it came time to top off the cupola with a lantern Maderno turned the design over to this prodigy. The paired columns follow the lantern of Saint Peter's but the capitals are quirky: a single cherub spreads its wings over both columns. This is the signature of a young man who was determined never to succumb to convention.

Castelli soon afterwards changed his name. As Francesco Borromini he would become one of the most original designers in the history of Italian architecture. His church of Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza, begun twenty years after Sant' Andrea, would be a refutation of every convention in Maderno's dome. Nevertheless, Borromini would revere Maderno for the rest of his life as the grand old man who gave him a start.

As the cupola and lantern were being finished, Cardinal Montalto hired two rival artists to fresco its interior. Giovanni Lanfranco was given the commission for the dome. He turned it into a paradise of music-making angels populated by dozens of saintly figures, most conspicuously the Virgin but also Saint Andrew, the



Photo: wikimedia.org/Architis



Photo: Author

Dome of Paradise. Cupola by Giovanni Lanfranco and pendentives by Domenichino

Luke the Evangelist by Domenichino

Theatine founder, and even Adam and Eve.

On the other hand, Lanfranco's rival from Bologna, Domenico Zampieri, called Domenichino, frescoed the pendentives with figures of the four Evangelists. Modeled on Michelangelo's prophets in the Sistine Chapel but if anything more colossal, they stretch their enormous limbs to fill the triangular spaces, accompanied by their attributes: an ox and icon for Luke, an eagle for John, an angel for Matthew, and a lion for Mark. Cardinal Peretti's own heraldic lion, gold on a scarlet field, fills the huge coats of arms under the pendentives.

Disaster Strikes

With Montalto's generosity fueling Maderno's architecture the project seemed to be hastening towards a happy conclusion. The *pièce-de-résistance* would have been a façade in homage to the generous cardinal. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, Montalto was carried off. He took ill of a sudden stomach ailment and died on June 2, 1623, aged fifty-two. He had given himself until fifty-seven to finish the façade, but had miscalculated by five years. He was buried in Santa Maria Maggiore but his heart was interred in Sant' Andrea. All over Rome, shops and churches closed in mourning, and for years afterwards the hatters and goldsmiths near the Cancelleria draped their shops on the anniversary of his death. No grief was as plentiful



Photo: Author

The dome of the Theatine church Nossa Senhora da Divina Providência, Goa, 1656-72

as that of the Theatine fathers, who had lost their generous patron.

The façade had risen only about a meter off the ground. Before the cardinal's death Maderno and Borromini had prepared a print of the future façade. It shows Montalto's heraldry, his lions and above all his name writ large in the cornice. A print like this tells a patron in a voice everyone could hear, "You won't go back on your promise now, will you?" But with Montalto gone the search for a patron proved fruitless.

Maderno died in 1629 and the façade would not be finished until the reign of Pope Alexander VII (1655-67), on Maderno's foundations but with a new design by Carlo Rainaldi.

Global Reach

Just as the Gesù would provide a model for Jesuit churches far from

Rome, so Sant' Andrea delle Valle would provide a model for the Theatines in their global expansion. In Palermo, the Theatine church of San Giuseppe was built immediately behind one of the famous Four Corners (*Quattro Cantoni*) at the center of the city. It lifts a version of Maderno's cupola high over the skyline of the Sicilian capital. Incidentally the domes over the side chapels of Sant' Andrea della Valle are copied here too. The brand of the Theatines was destined to spread farther still. In 1656-72, in the far-off Portuguese province of Goa the Theatines built the church of *Nossa Senhora da Divina Providência*. For the façade they copied Saint Peter's but they modeled the cupola on Sant' Andrea della Valle. Of course, given the distance from the archetype and the building technology available in Goa the dome is much simplified. Still, it shows how a Roman mother church could embody the spirit of a new religious order intent on encompassing the globe.



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