

From Icon to Relic: The Baroque Transformation of the *Salus Populi Romani*

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In partial response to the Protestant denunciation of sacred images, the Counter-Reformation Church in Rome initiated a widespread program to resanctify holy icons.¹ The renewed importance of such images for the *renovatio* of the Church was stated emphatically by the elaborate Baroque vocabulary employed in their re-installation. An important example of this process is seen in the tomb chapel erected by Paul V at S. Maria Maggiore and its altar that houses the icon, today known as the *Salus Populi Romani* (Figure 1).² Because of the long and revered history of the icon, the papal patronage of the site, and the nascent Baroque style used for the altar itself, the Pauline installation serves as a paradigm for the Counter-Reformation display of icons. In its new setting, embedded in a series of gold and marble frames, the *Salus Populi Romani* is revealed to be not simply a painted image of the Madonna and Child, but a relic, the precious remains of the Incarnation itself.

The program at the Pauline Chapel, initiated in 1605 and completed a decade later, is anticipated by the re-installation

of another revered icon at the Chiesa Nuova.³ This contemporary project anticipates the formal solution employed at the Pauline altar. In 1606, the Oratorian fathers of S. Maria in Vallicella commissioned a painting from Peter Paul Rubens for the high altar of their new church, the Chiesa Nuova.⁴ One of their requirements was that it should incorporate the miraculous image of the Madonna and Child which the fathers had preserved from their old church. Rubens finished the canvas of *Sts. Gregory and Domitilla, Surrounded by Four Saints* [Sts. Maurus and Papianus, Nereus and Achilleus] in 1607.⁵ Because of the poor light in the church the painting was unreadable, and the Church fathers asked Rubens to redo the work on a non-reflective surface. Instead of merely copying the composition on stone, in 1608 the painter came up with an entirely new arrangement that emphasized the venerated image (Figure 2). He removed the four flanking saints to two separate side panels, thereby focusing on the central scene. As in the previous version, the miracle-working image was concealed behind a copper panel that was, in turn, painted with Rubens'

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¹ Emile Mâle, *L'Art Religieux après le Concile de Trente* (Paris: A. Colin, 1932) esp. 29-36; Howard Hibbard, "Ut picturae sermones: The First Painted Decoration of the Gesù," in *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution*, ed. Rudolf Wittkower and Irma Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972) 30; and Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600 to 1750* (3rd ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1991) 21-25. For iconographic issues relating to icons and especially their role in the Counter-Reformation, see the recent publication by Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

See also David Freedberg, "The Origins and Rise of the Flemish Madonnas in Flower Garlands: Decoration and Devotion," *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 32 (1981): 115-150; and Sylvia Pagden, "From Cult Images to the Cult of Images: The Case of Raphael's Altarpieces," in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 178.

² Alexandra Herz discusses the tombs and their chapels as reflections of Counter-Reformation thought in *The Sixtine and Pauline Tombs in St. Maria Maggiore. An Iconographical Study* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1974); and in a summary of her dissertation, "The Sixtine and Pauline Tombs. Documents of the Counter-Reformation," *Storia dell'Arte* 43 (1981): 241-262. See also Klaus Schwager, "Die of

Architektonische Erneuerung von S. Maria Maggiore unter Paul V.," *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 20 (1983): 241-327.

³ See Torgil Magnussen, *Rome in the Age of Bernini*, vol. 1 (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1982) 162; and Ilse von zur Mühlen, "Nachtridentinische Bildauffassungen: Cesare Baronio und Rubens' Gemälde für S. Maria in Vallicella in Rom," *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 41 (1990): 46, and n. 114.

The parallels between these two altars has also been drawn by Gerhard Wolf in his recent article "Regina Coeli, Facies Lunae, 'et in terra pax,'" *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 27/28 (1991/92): 328-331. Here, the author explores the iconography of the fresco program, as well as the relationship of the decoration of the chapel to the installation of the icon at the altar.

⁴ Regarding this commission see: Michael Jaffé, "Peter Paul Rubens and the Oratorian Fathers," *Proporzioni* 4 (1963): 209-241; J. Müller Hofstede, "Rubens's first bozzetto for Sta. Maria in Vallicella," *Burlington Magazine* 106 (1964): 442-451; Martin Warnke, "Italienische Bildtabernakel bis zum Frühbarock," *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 19 (1968): 61-102; Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) 85-99; Volker Herzner, "Honor refertur ad prototypa: Noch einmal zu Rubens' Altarwerken für die Chiesa Nuova in Rom," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 42 (1979): 117-132; Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980) 537-545; and Peter Sutton, ed. *The Age of Rubens*, exh. cat., Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, September 22, 1993 - January 2, 1994 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993) 228-231.

imitation of the icon. A host of angels adore and support the framed copy. Raised on a pedestal of colored marbles, the altarpiece itself is flanked by red marble columns with gilt capitals and inlaid marble paneling. The preciousness of materials and the grandness of scale present the new image as if it were a heavenly apparition.

It is likely that Cardinal Cesare Baronius, author of the *Annales Ecclesiastici*, a history of the Catholic Church compiled to defend it against Protestant reformers, suggested the initial solution for the program of the high altar.⁶ Apparently his aim was to legitimize the veneration of the miracle-working image of the Virgin through a close association with the eucharistic ritual performed at the altar below.⁷ The manner in which the Chiesa Nuova image is embedded in the altar complex announces its dual role as both icon and relic. This same transformation was achieved through similar means with the installation of the *Salus Populi Romani* in 1613 in the Pauline Chapel at S. Maria Maggiore.

In this image the figures of the Madonna and Child are depicted against a background of gold inscribed with the Greek abbreviation for Mother of God (Figure 3).⁸ The icon is usually described as an example of the *Hodegetria* type, in which the Virgin gestures with her free hand, pointing to her Child.⁹ However, the *Salus Populi Romani* Virgin rests her right hand on top of her left and extends her thumb, index, and middle fingers in an allusion to the Trinity. Yet even this loose association with the *Hodegetria* type served to bolster the claim that this icon was painted by St. Luke himself.¹⁰ Indeed, such

a similarity was a common means of affirming its attribution to the hand of the Evangelist, and therefore the icon's venerable nature.¹¹

The miracle that proved the S. Maria Maggiore icon's efficacy and, thus, authenticated its avowed saintly origin, is said to have occurred in 590.¹² According to tradition, in an effort to save his people from the plague, Pope Gregory the Great carried the image through the streets of Rome. As the pope's procession approached St. Peter's, an angelic chorus was heard singing. When Gregory responded, the Archangel Michael appeared over the Castel Sant'Angelo, renamed after this event, and brought an end to the plague.¹³ The icon was thus credited as the savior of the Romans.¹⁴

In medieval Rome such powerful icons were closely identified with their location, acting as both representatives and patrons of their church.¹⁵ The documented history of the *Salus Populi Romani* connects it with one church, S. Maria Maggiore.¹⁶ This Roman basilica was the first church in all of Christendom dedicated to the Virgin, very likely in direct response to the proclamation of the Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, or Mother of God, at the Council of Ephesus in 431.¹⁷ According to legend, the basilica's foundation can be traced to a miraculous intervention of the Virgin.¹⁸ During the night between the fourth and fifth of August, in the year of 352, the Virgin appeared in a vision to both Pope Liberius and a wealthy patrician, directing them to erect a church in her honor on the spot where the snow fell on the Esquiline Hill. This snowfall outlined the plan of a church, and was miraculous evidence of the

⁵ For an illustration see Sutton 231, fig. 4.

⁶ Hofstede 446.

⁷ See Hofstede, Warnke, and especially von zur Mühlen 46-48, for the specific association of this icon with the Sacrament on the altar below as intended by the Oratorians to validate the worship of icons.

⁸ For selected literature on the *Salus Populi Romani* icon see: Giovanni Biasotti, "L'immagine della Madonna detta de S. Luca a S. Maria Maggiore a Roma," *Bollettino d'Arte* 10, no. 1-2 (1916): 231-236; Pico Cellini, *La Madonna di S. Luca in S. Maria Maggiore* (Rome, 1943); Carlo Cecchelli, *I mosaici della basilica di S. Maria Maggiore* (Turin: Ilte, 1956) 3-30; Pietro Amato, *De Vera Effigie Mariae: Antiche Icone Romane*, exh. cat., Rome, Basilica of S. Maria Maggiore, June 18 - July 3, 1988 (Rome: De Luca, 1988) 52-60; Maria Andaloro, "L'Icona della Vergine *Salus Populi Romani*," in *Santa Maria Maggiore a Roma*, ed. Carlo Pietrangeli (Florence: Nardini, 1988) 124-127; and Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani: Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter* (Weinheim: VCH, Acta Humaniora, 1990) esp. 131-160, 223-227, who dates the panel to the fifth or sixth century.

⁹ For discussions regarding type see Amato 59-60, and Andaloro 126-127.

¹⁰ According to Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990) 115, the *Hodegetria* was an image said to have been painted by St. Luke and kept at the Hodegon monastery. See also Belting, *Likeness* 53, 57.

¹¹ Authenticity was an important issue because it affected the ability of

the icon to work miracles and convey grace, and to this end types such as the *Hodegetria* and legends about them were created. At least six other icons in Rome held similar claims to authorship. See George Galavaris, *The Icon in the Life of the Church*, Iconography of Religions series, ed. Th. P. van Baaren, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981) 2, 12; and Belting, *Image* 133.

¹² This account can be found summarized by Steven F. Ostrow, *The Sistine Chapel at S. Maria Maggiore: Sixtus V and the Art of the Counter Reformation* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1987) 29.

¹³ The angels sang, "Regina Coeli laetere alleluia," and Gregory responded "Ora pro nobis Deum." Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel* 29.

¹⁴ At the time the icon was called the *Regina Coeli*, or Queen of Heaven; it was only in the nineteenth century that the icon finally gained the title of *Salus Populi Romani*, or Savior of the Roman People. See Wolf, "Regina Coeli" 285.

¹⁵ Hans Belting, "Icons and Roman Society in the Twelfth Century," in *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms and Regional Traditions*, ed. William Tronzo (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1989) 27, 30.

¹⁶ For an extensive study of the icon and related images see Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani*.

¹⁷ Emile Mâle, *The Early Churches of Rome*, trans. David Buxton (Chicago: Quadrangle Books Inc., 1960) 63-64.

¹⁸ See Paolo DeAngelis, *Basilicae S. Mariae Maioris de urbe a Liberio papa I usque ad Paulum V. Pont. Max. descriptio e delineatio auctore Abbate Paulo DeAngelis* (Rome, 1621) for the history and building of

Virgin's personal interest in and sanction of her basilica.

Both church and icon played central roles in the annual celebration of the Feast of the Virgin's Assumption on the fifteenth of August.¹⁹ As part of these events, the most sacred image of Christ, also said to have been begun by St. Luke, but finished by the hand of an angel, was removed from the Sanctum Sanctorum of S. Giovanni in Laterano and carried in procession to the basilica of S. Maria Maggiore.²⁰ At its culmination, the S. Maria Maggiore icon was brought out to meet the Lateran Savior. The two bowed to each other and then danced together in front of the facade of the basilica, a meeting which symbolized the honor paid by the Son to his Mother, as well as the alliance of the Lateran with S. Maria Maggiore.²¹

Beginning in the thirteenth century the *Salus Populi Romani* was kept in a tabernacle placed in front of the apse.²² This two-storey marble structure was erected at the expense of the Senate and People of Rome (S.P.Q.R.).²³ Another tabernacle, donated by Giacomo Giovanni Capocci and his wife in 1256, housed other important relics of the basilica.²⁴ These tabernacles stood on opposite sides of the nave, as recorded in DeAngelis' seventeenth-century engravings (Figure 6).²⁵ A third relic, the most important in S. Maria Maggiore, was the *presepe*, or Crib, of the Nativity, acquired in the sixth century.²⁶ This fragmentary piece of wood was installed in a copy of the original Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem. In 1291, during the reign of Pope Nicholas IV, a small chapel to house the Crib was built by Arnolfo di Cambio on the south side of the basilica.²⁷ In 1587 a new and larger chapel was commissioned to replace it by Cardinal Felice Peretti.

the basilica; see also Richard Krautheimer, et al., *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, Monumenti di Antichità Cristiana, ser. 2, vol. 3 (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1967) 1-60. An account of the legend of the snowfall is related by Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel* 3-4.

¹⁹ For interpretations of the procession of the Feast of the Assumption see Ernst Kitzinger, "A Virgin's Face: Antiquarianism in Twelfth-Century Art," *Art Bulletin* 62 (1980): 6-19; and William Tronzo, "Apse Decoration, the Liturgy and the Perception of Art in Medieval Rome: S. Maria in Trastevere and S. Maria Maggiore," in *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms and Regional Traditions*, ed. William Tronzo (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1989) 167-193. See also Belting, "Icons" 27-41; and David Freedberg, *Power of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 89-91.

²⁰ Kitzinger 12. This tradition dates back to the seventh century, and became more and more elaborate until it was abolished in Rome by Pope Pius V in the mid-sixteenth century, in response to Counter-Reformation strictness regarding the worship of icons.

²¹ Tronzo 180, 182; Belting, "Icons" 38, 40.

²² For the possible previous placement of the icon at the Porta Regina see n. 8 above, and Eunice D. Howe, "Antoniazio Romano and a Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore," *The Burlington Magazine* 126 (1984): 417-419.

²³ Howe 418, and n. 14, dates it to 1211.

²⁴ For the Capocci tabernacle see Julian Gardner, "The Capocci Tabernacle in S. Maria Maggiore," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 38

Cardinal Peretti built his chapel at S. Maria Maggiore in the plan of a Greek cross (Figure 4).²⁸ Within months of its initiation, the chapel's patron was elected pope and took the name of Sixtus V. The new addition was to serve both as the tomb chapel for Pius V and for Sixtus himself, as well as being the repository for the Crib relic. This relic of Christ's Nativity, still encased in its thirteenth-century chapel, was relocated beneath the floor in the center of Sixtus' chapel, where it could be reached by a horseshoe shaped staircase. Directly above the sunken Crib altar is a second altar surmounted by a gilded sacrament tabernacle. Four gilded bronze angels bearing cornucopias topped with candles support the tabernacle which is in the form of a domed temple. The significance of the tabernacle's centralized position was confirmed when the Sistine was declared the official Sacrament Chapel of the basilica in November of 1599.²⁹

Along with his plans for the Sistine, Sixtus originally intended to house the icon of the Madonna and Child in a chapel to be built across the nave from his own.³⁰ The building of a chapel to honor the icon of the Virgin was actually undertaken in 1605 by Sixtus' successor Pope Paul V (Figure 5). Together the two chapels define transept-like extensions off the Early Christian nave (Figures 6 and 7). Echoing the plan and program of the Sistine Chapel, Paul V's chapel contains two tombs and a reliquary altar that houses the precious icon. Thus, the paired chapels are the sites of two of the basilica's most important relics, those associated with Mary in her dual role as human mother in the Nativity, and as Mother of God, Intercessor for Salvation.

(1970): 220-230; Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel* 9; for tabernacles in general see Giuseppe Zander, "Considerazioni su un tipo di ciborio in uso a Roma nel Rinascimento," *Bollettino d'Arte* 26 (July-August 1984): 99-106.

²⁵ For further illustrations see DeAngelis 56, 82, 88.

²⁶ See Krautheimer 6. A ninth-century inscription reproduces a sixth-century deed of gift by Flavia Xanthippa: "BASILICAE SCAE DI GENETRICIS QA AD PRAESEPEM," the term "AD PRAESEPEM" may be a ninth-century interpolation.

²⁷ For information on the Oratory of the *Presepe* executed by Arnolfo di Cambio see Domenico Fontana, *Del modo tenuto nel trasportare l'obelisco vaticano e delle fabbriche fatte da Nostro Signore Sisto V* (Rome, 1589); Adolfo Venturi, "Frammenti del Presepe di Arnolfo nella Basilica Romana di S. Maria Maggiore," *L'Arte* 8, no. 2 (1905): 107-112; Angiola Maria Romanini, *Arnolfo di Cambio e lo "stil novo" del gotico italiano* (Milan: Ceschina, 1969) 181-186; Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel* 164-185; and Enzo Carli, *Arnolfo* (Florence: Edam, 1993) 178-181.

²⁸ See Klaus Schwager, "Zur Bautätigkeit Sixtus' V. an S. Maria Maggiore in Rom," *Veröffentlichung der Bibliotheca Hertziana, Miscellanea Bibliotheca Hertziana* (1961) 324-354; and Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel*.

²⁹ Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel* 190-194, claims that this placement was intended by Sixtus, if not at the time of the commission, at least by 1587 when the altar was being placed above the sunken *presepe*. For an opposing view see Herz, *Iconographical Study* 51-52.

³⁰ Ostrow, *Sistine Chapel* 460.

As in its pendant chapel, the side walls function as tombs, here dedicated to Pope Clement VIII and to Paul V.³¹ Each tomb has at its center a living effigy, surrounded by five sculptural reliefs commemorating the acts of each pope during his reign. Niche statues of Sts. John the Evangelist, Joseph, Denis, Bernard, David and Aaron are on the lateral walls, and the whole is surmounted by a sculptured frieze of putti and garlands.³² In the vault, stucco angels frame a fresco cycle devoted to the theme of triumph over heresy and iconoclasm. Depicted in the cupola above is the Immaculate Virgin surrounded by the Twelve Apostles.³³ They are accompanied by music-making angels in a golden sky. At the apex is an oculus where God the Father spreads his arms to welcome the Virgin into celestial Paradise. In this chapel, as in the Sistina, rich inlays of colored marble and precious stones cover the walls, framing the frescoes above and statues and reliefs below.³⁴ The rear wall is entirely given over to the altar with the icon of the Virgin.

The *Salus Populi Romani* was transferred from its tabernacle in the nave to the altar tabernacle in the Pauline Chapel on January 27, 1613, although the decoration of the altar, executed by Pompeo Targone from a design by Girolamo Rainaldi, was not completed until late in 1615.³⁵ Seven gilded bronze angels support the icon against a background of lapis lazuli, while the Holy Spirit hovers above in the form of a dove sur-

rounded by rays of golden light. The icon is set in the center within a jewelled frame, and the entire altarpiece is surrounded by a raised border of red jasper. This larger frame is flanked by four fluted red jasper columns with gilt bronze capitals and bases of green Sicilian marble covered with agate. Richly veined brown marble covers what is visible of the wall. Set into the broken pediment of the altar, above which appear five gilt bronze angels, is a relief in white marble and gilt bronze representing the famous legend of the Foundation of S. Maria Maggiore.³⁶ The uppermost angel holds out a crown as he waits for the Virgin to ascend.³⁷ His gesture connects the pediment with the angels in the center of the altar who support the icon. Their progress is both vertical—towards the pediment and the waiting crown—and outward—towards the worshipper. This dual movement is central in an interpretation of the form and meaning of the altar in the Paolina.

The Pauline altar is a multi-layered structure incorporating a painted icon that is held aloft by angels and enclosed in a red jasper frame.³⁸ The whole is then encompassed in a second, monumental architectural altar. The structure that encloses the icon is defined by multiple layers, not simply vertical levels, but also telescoping layers into or out of space. This arrangement prefigures the full-fledged Baroque style of Bernini's altar at Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, where two pairs of fluted red

³¹ Documents recording the commissions of the sculptors have been published by Maria Cristina Dorati, "Gli scultori della cappella Paolina in Santa Maria Maggiore," *Commentari*, no. 2/3 (1967): 231-260. For summary information and illustrations of the tombs see Herz, "Documents."

³² John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture* (revised, London: Phaidon, 1970) 91-92, and Herz, *Iconographical Study* 78, have both noted that the open poses of the statues break the plane of their niches and interact with the viewer. The orientation of the "living" effigy of Paul V, who kneels in prayer as he faces the altar, facilitates his participation in the space and activity of the chapel. It is noteworthy that this motif of a community of saints presenting a kneeling donor to the enthroned Madonna and Child recalls a *sacra conversazione*, which here takes place across the activated space of the chapel and includes the worshipper. This arrangement again parallels the apse at S. Maria in Vallicella, where it has been noted that the removal of the attendant saints to separate flanking panels expanded the *sacra conversazione* across the space of the apse (see n. 4).

³³ For documents regarding the painting commission and for iconographical analysis see: Anna Maria Corbo, "I pittori della Cappella Paolina in S. Maria Maggiore," *Palatino*, no. 3 (1967): 301-313. A summary treatment of the painted decoration is found in Herz, *Iconographical Study* 67-71.

³⁴ See Steven F. Ostrow, "Marble Revetment in Late Sixteenth-Century Roman Chapels," in *IL60: Essays Honoring Irving Lavin on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (New York: Ithaca Press, 1990) 253-276, esp. 254, for a discussion of polychrome interiors which were intended to evoke a vision of heavenly Paradise.

³⁵ Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Ernest Graf (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1952) 26: 404, 406; Herz, *Iconographical Study* 67; and Magnussen 1: 154.

Indeed, the actual translation ceremony evoked Mary's Ascension to Paradise, as stated by Agostino Cassandri da Castelfidardo, who also

commented on the dual nature of the icon: both earthly and divine. This is also demonstrated by the covers made for the translation of the icon to the Paolina, discovered by Gerhard Wolf, "Regina Coeli" 320-326, figs. 37-39; see also Pagden 187, n. 76. The covers are painted on their inner sides, so that they form a triptych with the icon in the center when opened. On the left wing the Virgin is depicted full length, and on the right wing St. Luke sits in front of an easel, painting the Virgin as she appears in the icon, and accompanied by a figure identified by Wolf as St. John the Evangelist. Such visual emphasis on the autograph nature of the icon, accompanied by inscriptions which stress the divinely sanctioned origin of the image, would have served to secure its rightful place in the worship of the faithful.

³⁶ For the relief see Pope-Hennessy 91, 423, 440; and Herz, *Iconographical Study* 67. This subject serves as a reminder of the Virgin's miraculous appearance on earth, and specific sanction of S. Maria Maggiore as her basilica.

³⁷ This is a standard representation of the Virgin at her Coronation. Here, the crowning angel, as messenger of God, affirms the icon of the Virgin as an authentic relic while at the same time invoking her role as Intercessor for Salvation.

³⁸ This arrangement is foreshadowed in an unusual altar, commissioned in 1481 and erected in the Siennese Cathedral for Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini, the future Pius III. This multi-storied marble altar is, like the Pauline altar, conceived as a telescoped chapel. From the concave back wall projects a monumental sculpted niche. In its center is a second, smaller altar that houses a fourteenth-century panel of the Virgin and Child. The spatial complexity of this scheme focuses attention on the innermost image, reinforced by not one but two enframing altars. For discussion and illustrations see Harold Mancusi-Ungaro, *Michelangelo: The Bruges Madonna and the Piccolomini Altar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) 58-101; Enzo Carli, *Il Duomo di Siena* (Genoa: Sagep, 1979) 127-133; and Shelley Zuraw, "The Sculpture of Mino da Fiesole (1429-1484)" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1993) 1109-1118.

marble columns stand before a small altar chapel.³⁹ Inside, a painting of the *Martyrdom of St. Andrew* is framed in red marble and supported by golden angels in a glory of gold rays. The pediment above curves around a statue of St. Andrew, who floats upward, as if rising to heaven. Both the horizontal layering and the explicit verticality of Bernini's altar, which moves from painting, to pediment, to dome, is anticipated by the Pauline altar. As at Sant'Andrea, the progression in the Pauline Chapel from icon to crowning angel to celestial vision is both formal and symbolic.⁴⁰

The vertical orientation from altar to oculus links the icon with the program of the chapel, making it appear to be an apparition in the celestial vision. The polychromy of the chapel evokes an earthly vision of the heavenly Paradise. Indeed, it was so described in two orations delivered in the chapel in 1613, when it was observed by Pompeo Brunelli that "Pope [Paul V] has made a paradise on the Esquiline, which...corresponds to that celestial Paradise."⁴¹

The swirling backdrop of lapis lazuli creates the effect of clouds parting to reveal the miraculous image of the Virgin and Child. At the center of this vision is the icon, accompanied by angels who simultaneously present it, carry it up to heaven, and bring it down to earth. These attendant angels who present the icon have a second purpose: they define the site as an altar. Their presence is evoked during the service of the Mass when the celestial liturgy is enacted through the liturgy of the Church.⁴² William Durand describes their role: "Here we sing the hymn of the angels because we have no doubt that through this sacri-

fice earthly things are joined together with heavenly things, and thus we proclaim we are saved with them on high."⁴³ Angels thus serve as the link between heaven and earth, between the celestial liturgy and that taking place on the altar below.

The appearance of an angelic choir was also specifically associated with the display of the Eucharist.⁴⁴ Their role has been described by Sinding-Larsen as an illustration "of how God through Christ at a heavenly altar accepts the Eucharistic offering carried up by the angel...."⁴⁵ The prayers from the Canon Mass emphasize Christ's bodily presence, and this presence is preserved for us in the Host, the relic of his sacrifice and the path to Salvation.⁴⁶ These prayers find their visual depiction on altars in the form of angels surrounding altars and sacrament tabernacles.

Angels become increasingly prominent on sixteenth-century tabernacles, as is evident on the sacrament tabernacle in Sixtus V's chapel at S. Maria Maggiore. Here again, the angels signal the presence of the Host. This conjunction of tabernacle and reliquary, defined by the presence of angels, is analogous to the dual purpose of the Sistine altar—as tabernacle and as site of the Christian Mass.⁴⁷ In the Paulina the angels reappear at the altar, conjoining the tradition of reliquaries and wall tabernacles for the Sacrament: they hold the icon aloft in a giant reliquary.⁴⁸ Through them the icon is preserved and displayed, formally and theologically associated both with relics and the enactment of Christ's sacrifice at the altar.⁴⁹ The Holy Mother and Child, an image of Christ's incarnation on earth, is thus equated with Christ's bodily presence at the altar during Mass.

³⁹ See Emilio Lavagnino et al., ed., *Altari Barocchi in Roma* (Rome: Banco di Roma, 1959) 89-92; and Torgil Magnusen, *Rome in the Age of Bernini*, vol. 2 (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1986) 197-202.

⁴⁰ Visually, the Pauline altar can also be related to an earlier chapel in S. Maria Maggiore, begun for the Sforza in 1560. A painted altarpiece of the *Assumption of the Virgin* is flanked by colored marble columns and a matching polychrome pediment. Above the pediment is a second painting, of the *Coronation of the Virgin*. These two subjects, which reveal Mary as Intercessor for humankind in the heavenly liturgy, anticipate not only the orientation but also the significance of these same themes in the Pauline Chapel. For color illustrations see Liliana Barroero, "La Basilica dal Cinquecento all'Ottocento," in *Santa Maria Maggiore a Roma*, ed. Carlo Pietrangeli, et al. (Florence: Nardini, 1988) 215-315, esp. 214.

⁴¹ Ostrow, "Marble Revetment" 265.

⁴² Staale Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography and Ritual: A Study of Analytical Perspectives* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984) 25-26.

⁴³ William Durand closely quotes St. Gregory the Great in his *On the Preface*. Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography* 24.

⁴⁴ An early example of this visual tradition is Desiderio da Settignano's sacrament tabernacle in S. Lorenzo, Florence, where angels are in attendance on the Host. See Jack Freiberg, "The *Tabernaculum Dei*: Masaccio and the 'Perspective' Sacrament Tabernacle" (M.A. thesis, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, October 1974); and Martha Dunkelman, "A New Look at Donatello's Saint Peter's Tabernacle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 118 (1991): 1-16.

⁴⁵ Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography* 25-26.

⁴⁶ This association is explicitly revealed in Mino da Fiesole's 1481 sacrament altar from Sant'Ambrogio, Florence. Behind a metal grate in the center is preserved a precious relic of Christ's sacrifice. In front of it, angels hold a chalice upon which stands a sculpture of the Blessing Child, a material representation of the True Host. See Eve Borsook, "Cults and Imagery at Sant'Ambrogio in Florence," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 25 (1981): 147-202; and Zuraw 404-444.

The supporting angels recall an earlier tradition, where angels display relics other than the Host. An example is a fourteenth-century crystal reliquary at San Domenico, Bologna. See Jack Freiberg, *The Lateran and Clement VIII* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1993) pt. 1, 231; pt. 2, fig. 218.

⁴⁷ The centralized plan of this tabernacle explicitly associates it in form and function with the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem, a reliquary for the body of Christ. See Staale Sinding-Larsen, "Some Functional and Iconographical Aspects of the Centralized Church in the Italian Renaissance," *Acta ad archaeologium et artium historiam pertinentia* 2 (1965): 203-252, esp. 227ff.

⁴⁸ This recalls the tradition of placing the Host and relics in the same container. See Freiberg, "*Tabernaculum Dei*" 59, n. 3, and 65, n. 26; and Borsook 154.

⁴⁹ See above, n. 7. The icon itself can be interpreted as visual proof of the Incarnation, of God made man, and therefore also an everlasting re-enactment of God's sacrifice for men. See Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Arte e*

This conflation of icon, relic, and altar at the Pauline Chapel is echoed in the final arrangement at the Chiesa Nuova. In 1681 a sacrament tabernacle designed by Ciro Ferri was placed on the high altar in front of Rubens' painted altarpiece.⁵⁰ As is evident in a drawing for the tabernacle, the conception is very similar to the altar in the Pauline Chapel.⁵¹ Whereas the icon and the Host were divided between the Sistine and Pauline Chapels, the icon is displayed together with the Sacrament at the Oratorian church. In both instances, the formal vocabulary for the icon and for the Sacrament is the same: they are both physical relics of the divine presence on earth.

In Paul V's chapel at S. Maria Maggiore, the presence of the Virgin—as Intercessor, vessel of the Incarnation, Defender of the Faith, and Queen of Heaven—is evoked through a complex interweaving of architecture, sculpture and painting. In each of these manifestations she affirms for all time her role as Mother of God. The chapel is an explicit appeal to the faithful

and, simultaneously, a visual negation of the Protestant Reformation. In the fresco immediately above the altar, the Virgin inspires her followers with the True Creed, thus enabling them to combat the heretics who reject her.⁵² Yet, this narrative depiction of the defense of the True Faith against heresy is no more explicit than the symbolic meaning acquired by the icon on the altar. Displayed as a relic by means of a Baroque vocabulary of forms and materials associated with sacrament tabernacles and reliquaries, the icon is mute testimony to the Virgin's efficacy. Projected forward over the altar, carried aloft into the dome, and floating eternally before our eyes, the icon is transformed into an activated symbol of the power of faith. It is as if the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption has been transformed into a glorious celestial event attended by golden angels and witnessed by the saints and popes who look to her for Salvation.

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architettura sacra (Rome: casa del libro, 1981) 130-138.

See also n. 35, and Wolf, "Regina Coeli" 325-326. Belting, *Likeness* 486-488, presents Rubens' altar at S. Maria in Vallicella as an image tabernacle alluding to the Incarnation, and observes that the dove of the Holy Spirit above the icon on the altar in the Paolina recalls the Incarnation and the presence of divine grace in the image. The belief that the divine presence is captured in the icon is demonstrated, in both image and word, by the sportelli made for the translation of the icon to the chapel. The figures on the opened panels flanking the icon re-enact the Annunciation, which is formally recalled by Mary's pose, her finger between the pages of a book, facing St. John the Evangelist who stands with his hand raised as if transmitting the Word. It is as if the Incarnation takes place before our eyes, for the icon appears in the highly charged space between these figures, the recipient of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁰ Lavagnino 62, pl. p. 63; Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art* (1989; reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 89, fig. 109.

⁵¹ Montagu fig. 110.

⁵² Herz, *Iconographical Study* 70. The painting of *St. John the Evangelist and the Virgin Inspiring St. Gregory Thaumaturgos* was executed by the Cavalier d'Arpino.



Figure 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *The 'Madonna della Vallicella' Adored by Seraphim and Cherubim*, oil on slate, 1608, High Altar, Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome. Alinari/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 1. Pompeo Targone *et al.*, after design by Girolamo Rainaldi, Altar, colored marbles, red jasper, gilt bronze, precious stones, lapis lazuli, 1611-1615, Cappella Paolina, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Alinari/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 3. Anonymous, *Salus Populi Romani*, gessoed canvas applied to panel, 117 x 79 cm., 5th/6th century, Cappella Paolina, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Alinari/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 4. Domenico Fontana, Cappella Sistina, 1585-1590, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Alinari/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 5. Flaminio Ponzio, Cappella Paolina, view towards the entrance, 1605-1616, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Alinari/Art Resource, NY.

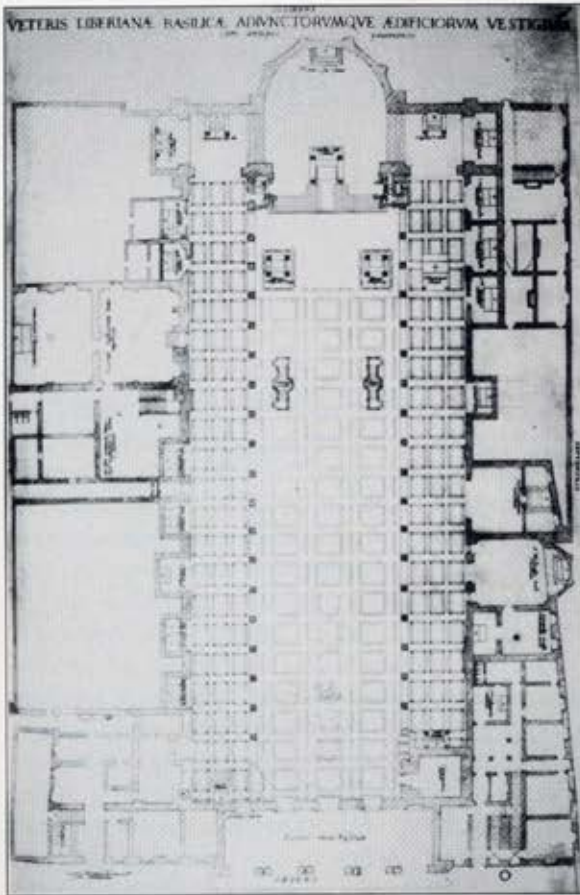


Figure 6. [left] Paolo DeAngelis, schematic reconstruction of the ground plan of Santa Maria Maggiore from the early 1600s, showing the tabernacles in the nave, engraving, 1621, *Basilicae S. Mariae Maioris de urbe a Liberio papa I usque ad Paulum V. Pont. Max. descriptio e delineatio auctore Abbate Paulo DeAngelis.*

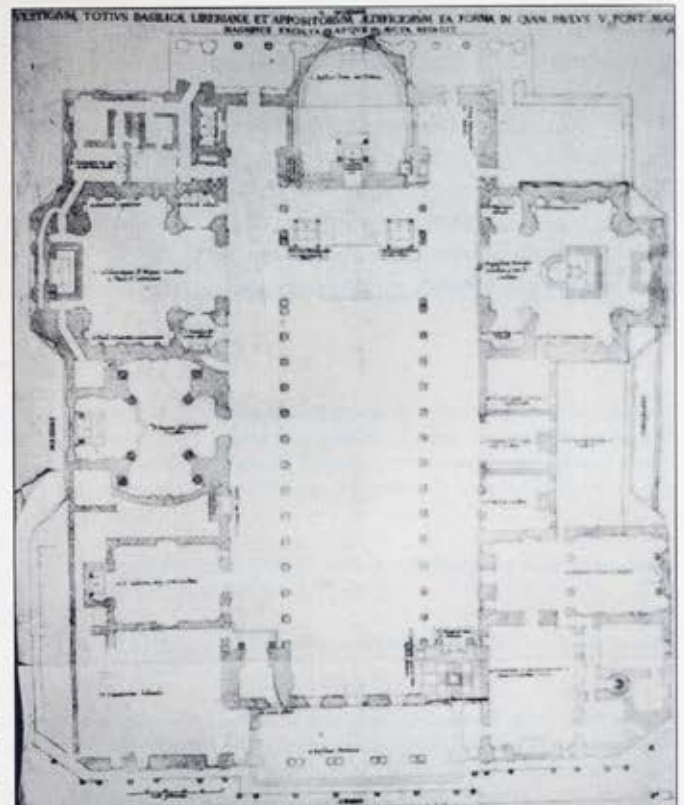


Figure 7. [right] Paolo DeAngelis, groundplan of S. Maria Maggiore from 1616, recording the Borghese projects, engraving, 1621, *Basilicae Santa. Mariae Maioris de urbe a Liberio papa I usque ad Paulum V. Pont. Max. descriptio e delineatio auctore Abbate Paulo DeAngelis.*