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Rome Questions

Part II: 8-14

8. Why is the Emperor Constantine so important for an understanding of the development of Rome throughout the Middle Ages?

* Constantine is commonly regarded as the first Christian emperor of Rome, displaying a shift in religion, and further customs and values during the Middle Ages.
* Constantine’s early efforts to mend religious strife in Africa, and his success in persecuting the “wrong type of Christians,” displays early religious conflict in the Middle Ages, and foreshadows the types of problems Rome would undergo as a Christian empire.
* Constantine established the first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, an act which speaks to the emphasis and importance of churches and religious practice during the Middle Ages.
* In addition to setting precedent for and implementing Christian resources in Rome, Constantine further placed men of Christian faith in high government and military positions, securing the Christian influence.
* Constantine’s defeat of Licinius marked the end of the Diocletian tetrarchy system, which had stably governed Rome for more than twenty years prior.

9. Discuss the history and the significance of the Church of St. John Lateran and its Baptistery.

* Christian Emperor Constantine commanded the building of the Church of St. John Lateran to be the cathedral and residence for the Pope (Melchiade), a purpose it would serve throughout the Middle Ages.
* Its basilica was dedicated to Christ the Savior by Pope Sylvester I, John the Baptist by Pope Sergio III, and St. John the Evangelist by Pope Lucius.
* In 1377, when the Popes returned from their 70+ year stay in France, the basilica was so heavily damaged that the Vatican was moved to a new location.
* Contrary to popular medieval legend, Constantine was never baptized in the basilica he built nor by a Pope, but rather on his deathbed by a bishop.
* Until the late 300s, the Church of St. John Lateran remained the only place to be baptized in all of Rome.

10. In the 5th and 6th centuries, the expansion of Christianity led to the creation of large churches to accommodate the increasing numbers of Romans joining the new faith. These churches grew and developed over the next 1500 years. What are the major religious themes contained within two outstanding example of this architectural development: Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Sabina?

* The basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, as prescribed in its title, shows the movement of the church’s emphasis and acceptance of Mary as the mother of God.
* The legend of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore—that the virgin Mary appeared to Pope Liberius during the summer and there was a miraculous snowfall—mirrors dreams and visions experienced by prophets and other individuals in the Bible.
* The basilica of Santa Sabina bears the earliest image of Jesus’ crucifixion, perhaps the most well known and poignant of all Christian themes and stories.
* The basilica of Santa Sabina features multiple other wooden panels, most of which depict scenes from the Bible. These scenes include Moses, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the denial of Peter, and the ascension of Christ.
* The story Santa Sabina, whom the basilica is dedicated to, is one of martyrdom, a common theme in Christianity and a highly honored fate for those of the faith.

11. Describe a visit to San Clemente with an eye to the ways in which this one space captures centuries of history with its 3 different levels of archeological treasures as well as the significance of the early 15th century Fresco of Masolino in the Branda Chapel.

* The basilica of San Clemente’s top and most recent floor was built in the 12th century on top of the remains of a 5th century church that was built on top of ancient Roman ruins, namely a house and other parts of a town.
* Each layer of the basilica speaks to the time period’s religious practices and customs; the house at the bottom of the basilica was used in its time to host small, secret Christian gatherings before the religion was legalized.
* The Mithraic temple, of the center layer of the basilica, was also built prior to the acceptance and widespread practice of Christianity in Rome; its appearance is very subdued compared to the ornate and elaborate decorations of the top cathedral built at a time when Christianity was very popular.
* Like the structure of the church itself, the mosaic is a combination of the old and the new; its images feature figures characteristic of its most modern layer as well as medieval motifs.
* The mosaic was the first large-scale apse decoration to be produced in Rome in almost two hundred years.

12. What are the major themes contained within the Sistine Chapel?

* The center of the ceiling displays nine stories from the book of Genesis, including creation, Adam and Eve, and Noah. These stories display the shortcomings of mankind and their rebirth in God.
* The front wall of the Sistine Chapel shows “The Last Judgment,” depicting God’s judgment of men’s sins, showing a wrathful God who punishes those who rejected him and his values, as well as a loving God who justly rewards the good in spirit.
* The North Wall holds eight panels depicting the life of Christ from birth to Passion. This ode to Jesus shows his God’s love of mankind through his gift of his son.
* Moses and his life are depicted on the South Wall, which emphasizes the Jewish teachings and practices, as well as the many miracles witnessed by Moses.
* The entrance wall hosts the final panels of both Moses and Jesus’ life. In the depiction of the resurrection of Jesus, there is a display of sacrifice and forgiveness by God.

13. Describe how Michelangelo celebrates the human body in the following four works: the Pieta in St. Peter’s Basilica; the Moses in San Pietro in Vincoli; the Cristo Della Minerva in Santa Maria sopra Minerva; and the David at the Galleria dell’Accademia in Florence.

* In Pieta, the image of Christ hangs limply on Mary after Crucifixion. Despite Jesus’ deceased state, his arm muscles and emaciated frame displaying ribs, are very true to life. However, Michelangelo’s attention to Mary’s expression is most telling, giving the piece an emotional feel.
* The image of Moses in San Pietro in Vincoli is extremely detailed in its depiction of Moses’ muscles and hair. Michelangelo, in his paintings and sculptures, spent a significant amount of time studying the human body in both living and deceased models, analyzing their anatomy. His attention to the human body’s form was so meticulous, he often portrayed muscles that did not even exist.
* Contrary the depiction of Christ in Pieta, Michelangelo here shows Christ as more lively and fit. Like the sculpture of Moses, Michelangelo gives particular attention the detail of the body’s muscles and movement.
* Michelangelo’s David combines the detail of human anatomy with the science of human movement and stature. Michelangelo’s portrayal is realistically cured and physically pure, combining the natural and scientific accuracy of the body with the majestic God given grandeur of its being.
* Unlike medieval depictions of humans, Michelangelo’s Renaissance approach is curved the true nature of the body’s form and hides nothing. His statues celebrate the individual and his physical capabilities, celebrating both science and religion.

14. What are the themes of the Raphael rooms in the Vatican Museum articulated within his frescoes of the School of Athens and the Disputations on the Eucharist? And, why is Raphael’s painting of the Transfiguration considered to be among the finest paintings ever produced in the Renaissance?

* Characteristic of the Renaissance, Raphael celebrates philosophical thought and development in *The School of Athens,* displaying well known thinkers and emphasizing the importance of such enlightenment to the time.
* Very revolutionarily, Raphael depicts famous thinkers from multiple periods of time in one space, where they otherwise would not have been together. In this way, Raphael groups the figures thematically, rather than historically, by their common contribution to philosophy.
* Raphael’s central figures, Plato and Aristotle, juxtapose each other in their approach to the thinking. Where Plato was very abstract, Aristotle was much more concrete.
* In content, Raphael’s *Transfiguration* displays the paramount Christian message of God’s forgiveness and mankind’s sin.
* Additionally, the *Transfiguration* speaks to the historical state of Christianity at the time. Just as Jesus is portrayed as an authority over his people, so too would the heads of the Roman Catholic Church like to be regarded as powerful and governing bodies over Rome.