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Rome Questions

Part III: 15-21

15. In what ways does the Basilica of St. Peters embody Roman Catholic Christianity in terms of its history and major ideas?

* Primarily financed by popes and princes during the Middle Ages, reflecting the Catholic system of financial patronage of the time.
* Heaven, represented by the dome, and earth, represented by the floor, united by the circular mosaics at the base of the dome, representing Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who showed humanity the way to heaven through God.
* Much of the artwork within (mosaics of the inhabitants of heaven, statues of Mary, etc) depict key figures of the Catholic faith.
* Influence of Ancient Roman persecution of early Christians present in the very namesake of the Basilica; it is where St. Peter was put to death by Nero.
* Decoration by famous artists (Michelangelo, Sangallo, Raphael, Bernini, etc.) demonstrative of Catholic patronage of Renaissance artists.

16. Examine the works of Caravaggio (1571-1610) and offer examples of how his works accomplish the following: a) an accentuated naturalness b) with a dynamic expression of movement, and c) scenes of intense drama where moments of piety, or conversion or martyrdom articulate a direct encounter between God and the human person, as if divine grace is powerfully visualized as a ray of light breaking into the darkness.

* *The Calling of St. Mathew* tells the story of Jesus choosing St. Mathew by incorporating interplay of light and color contrast.
* *Boy With a Basket*, in which the fruit have exquisite, life-like which represent perfection within the godly creation of nature.
* *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew* is entirely dark, save for the angelic white of the angel descending to earth and the red cloak of St. Matthew himself
* *The Madonna di Palafrenieri* depicts Mary assisting Jesus in crushing the devil, symbolized as a serpent, a very dramatic scene in both theory and Biblical lore
* *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* has dramatic shading, representing the grim, dramatic nature of the scene, as well as well-expressed movement on the part of both St. Peter and his executioners

17. Examine the works of Bernini (1598-1680) and offer examples of how his creations accomplish the following: a) an animation of the material by the spiritual where the invisible power of vitality actualizes the visible materiality of marble; b) where the designs of the work combine monumentality with lightness; and, c) Where the artistic expression is perfectly in tune with the propaganda aims of the Papacy and is often a glorification of the Pontiff and his family in a triumphal image of the Church.

* *The Fountain of the Four Rivers* represents the regions the Church claimed authority over, as well as the natural holiness of the four main rivers of the world
* Bernini’s *David* is poised, ready to strike down Goliath, with a violent and aggressive expression, contrasted in the immaculate whiteness of the marble; this represents his holy and divinely ordained violence
* The *Baldachino* at St. Peter’s pays homage to Pope Urban VIII through elements of his coat of arms, showing Bernini’s loyalty to the papacy
* *The Ecstasy of S. Teresa di Avila* was specifically designed to be both monumental/dramatic in scope, with its subjects’ expressive faces, and yet lightly illuminated by a hidden window
* St. Peter’s Basilica’s *Monument to Alexander VII*, even in name, represents Bernini’s subservience to the papacy which patronized him

18. How are the values of the Counter Reformation expressed within the Jesuit churches in Rome through their architectural and artistic expressions? Notice in particular the Baroque Ceilings with their a) capacity to provide a glimpse of the heavenly realm through the use of great verticality; b) settings that offers areas of light and darkness on a monumental scale as it presents the dramatic arrangement of figures; and, c) themes of the triumph of the saints and the newly emerging religious orders, such as the Jesuits, over the teachings of the Protestants.

* The Church of St. Ignatius depicts the known world of the time, demonstrating the Church’s attempts to seem more worldly and accepting
* Many Jesuit churches were large and open, designed to accommodate large numbers of people for mass at once, making Catholic mass more accessible
* Theatrical colors celebrate godliness and the beauty of divinity thus creating a relationship between the individual and the Church.
* Vaulted ceilings displaying the clouds of Heaven, populated with the most famous of Catholic figures, portray salvation as lofty heights worthy of attainment
* Continued general ostentatiousness of Counter Reformation churches opposed Reformation values, making the Church seem resolute and resistant to “unholy” influence

19. Discuss the Fountains of Rome by using examples to illustrate how the fountains are sumptuous work of urban decoration where functionality and ideas wonderfully fused into a dramatic interplay of Art, Nature, and Symbolism.

* The Trevi Fountain, with its light, smooth lines and fantastic imagery, was originally used as water transport in Rome
* *Fontana del Tritone* is a theatrical performance as well as a fountain, representing the cure-all effects of water, God’s gift to Earth
* Many of the fountains of Rome honor the popes who commissioned them, with the Papal coat of arms decorating the majority
* *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi*, as previously discussed, symbolized the relationship between the Church, God, and nature itself through its depiction of the four major world rivers
* *Aqua Triana’s* new design allowed for the water, propelled by gravity, to flow differently, better serving the function of both the structure and the beauty it represented

20. In what ways did the Romans and then the Papacy conceptualize the value and meaning of Obelisks?  What role did they play for Ancient Rome and the Papal city of Rome?

* Many of the obelisks had been moved from Egypt itself, representing the resources at the disposal of the Church
* Crosses affixed to the top of ancient obelisks represented the Christian triumph over the old Pagan religions
* The Obelisk of Constantine, the largest in the world, was strategically placed so pilgrims could see the “domination” of Christianity
* The recreated obelisk of *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* represented the papacy’s perception of dominion over the world of God
* Perhaps unintentionally, the tall, conspicuous obelisks serve as landmarks while traveling the city

21. How does the Victor Emmanuel Monument, the Vittoriano, articulate the values of the unification of Italy into a modern country?

* The Italian National Forces attempted to unite Italy through the Victor Emmanuel Monument, which served as a symbol of Italian fraternity.
* Style of monument harkened back to older artistic traditions of Italy; great marble columns, Roman religious iconography, central statuary, etc.
* Immense verticality of the building attempted to dwarf the height-represented authority of the dwindling papal state architecture.
* The theme of Vittoriano is unity and liberation from oppression, and Latin inscriptions of “unity of the homeland” and “freedom of the citizens” are inscribed upon the gateway.
* Highly controversial structure, unintentionally and ironically representing the uneasiness of Italian unification