

Basilica -- The Splendor and the Scandal: Building St. Peter's. R.A. Scotti. New York: Plume Books, 2006.

"... the story of its construction is as convoluted and controversial as the Church it serves... begun as a symbol of Christian unity, the Basilica would fracture the Church..." [xviii]

"the popes who commissioned them... included aesthetes and epicures, monks and militants, a pair of Medici princes, a bastard, a bookworm, at least two poets, a scholar, and a swineherd. If their morals were questionable, their taste was impeccable. They coaxed and commanded the greatest work from the largest number of master-artists ever engaged on a single project." [xix-xx]

"... a world unsurpassed for the exuberance of its ideas and its freedom of expression." [xv]

Part I: The Christian Caesar 1503-1513

Chapter TWO: The First St. Peter's

After treating Peter's martyrdom – "Christianity became an outlaw religion... All that changed in A.D. 312 with the cross, the Milvian bridge, and the young general who would be emperor." [15]

Constantine "could afford to humor his mother." [15]

Regarding the Renaissance: "... humanism embraced the paganism of Greece and Rome. Long-forgotten classical texts offered a perspective on man and the universe dramatically different from the stern proscription of the medieval Church." [19]

Nicholas V welcomed by humanists. [19]

Chapter THREE: Il Terribilis

The *Pieta* translated into marble the words that Dante wrote in the *Paradiso*, "Mary, daughter of your son." [26]

Regarding Julius II's election: "It had taken almost twenty years and involved bribery, war, assassination plots, and at least the suspicion of poisoning – all very much business as usual in the Renaissance Church." [27]

"Constantine had "blurred the distinction between Caesar and God." [23]

"The secular and the sacred borrowed so freely from each other that by the time the Renaissance reached Rome, the two were as inseparable as body and soul." [23]

Regarding Renaissance popes: "Within their ranks were pure souls, rascals, brilliant minds and bureaucrats, that this one indomitable warrior-patron." [28]

"Modesty has never been a Roman virtue." [28]

"His goals were sure and bold: to assert the authority of the Church by regaining control of the Papal States... and to display its power and prestige through art and architecture." 29]

Chapter FOUR: A Trojan Horse

“Constantine’s basilica came to symbolize the resilience and continuity of the Church.” It had been “looted, embellished, desecrated, and ornamented with mosaics, frescoes, statues, precious gems, gold and silver. Chapels and memorials had been tacked on haphazardly.” [39]

“Erasmus of Rotterdam condemned the new Basilica as a sacrilege and grandiose waste of money.” [39]

“Art was an integral part of the political game.: [40]

“The popes who built St. Peter’s were the Morgans and Rockefellers of their day.” [40]

“... oceans of gold and silver would soon wash across the seas from the Americas.” [41]

“Heroic size is itself a claim to divinity, the ultimate chest-pounding.” [58]

Chapter EIGHT: Onward Christian Soldiers

“The Church of Rome was the first huge international enterprise. It was a global company centuries before the word *globalization* was coined, and like any global organization today, it had multiple sources of revenue.” [68]

“... the prime revenue sources were real estate, religion, and natural resources.” [68]

Chapter NINE: A Christian Imperium

Bramante’s “unorthodox strategy – building from the center out – fixed the nucleus of St. Peter’s immutably.” [79]

The idea of offering indulgences was proffered by the pope’s financier (Chigi). [83]

“The idea was similar to a pledge drive today, except that instead of an immediate thank-you gift, say a logo tote bag, donors received a reduced sentence in purgatory – the inherent presumption being that if you could afford to contribute, you were probably not on the fast track to heaven.” [83]

“The Church was the best career opportunity for young intellectuals. If you were intelligent and played your cards right, you could gain fame, wealth, even the papal tiara.” [84]

“The Vatican had the first Arabic printing press and produced the first cookbook as well as works on historical criticism, gardening, and fishing, one of the pope’s favorite pastimes.” [84-85]

“Bramante was always looking for new and better ways to build.” [86]

Chapter TEN: A Viper’s Nest

Bramante “may have been gay” – “...his intimate friend, Giuliano Leno, who made himself wealthy overseeing the construction yard of St. Peter’s...” [97]

Michelangelo as “the original unwashed artist.” [98]

Chapter ELEVEN: The Death of Julius

Sistine Chapel ceiling unveiled on All Hallow's Eve. [103]

Julius II had many critics. "To such critics as Erasmus... the church was triumphant when it was most Christlike." [105]

"But to Julius, the Church was triumphant when it was seen to be the supreme authority." [106]

Julius fathered three daughters. "in the Renaissance Church a lapse in celibacy was not a detriment to career advancement." [107]

Erasmus wrote a tract entitled *Julius exclusus*. [109-110]

PART TWO: The Deplorable Medici Popes 1513-1534

Chapter TWELVE: The First Medici Prince

"In reaction to the Aristotelian dialectic of Thomas Aquinas, they enshrined [Plato] as their philosophic god. These sixteenth-century neo-Platonists made beauty their ideal and man the measure of all things – the harmonious center of creation, freed from the constraints of the medieval Church to express and realize every desire." [114]

“... the God of the Thomists receded from the footlights and the idea of the individual, messy and flawed, in need of confession and contrition was replaced by the idealized man – perfectly proportioned, free to express himself sensually, artistically, and intellectually.” [114]

"... the Renaissance Church reveled in the fullness of human nature." [115]

Chapter FOURTEEN: A Roman Candle

"Many of Raphael's Madonnas, it was said, had the face of his latest mistress." [130]

Chapter FIFTEEN: The Revenge of the Sangallos

"When Leo had exhausted..."

Chapter SIXTEEN: Salvation for Sale

"Granting an indulgence is comparable to commuting a sentence." [145]

"Mass runs of indulgences rolled off the ecclesiastical printing presses." [146]

"... they peddled indulgences like eternal annuities." [147]

Luther "questioned the increasingly mercenary Church." [147]

Luther's 95 theses – tacked on the Wittenberg door on All Hallow's Eve (five years after the unveiling of the Sistine ceiling) contained two on indulgences (#50 and #82).

Chapter SEVENTEEN: Sweet Revenge

“Alexander VI had answered the Florentine friar Savanarola’s bonfire of the vanities with his own bonfire and tossed the friar on the pyre.” [152]

“Like Nero fiddling as Rome burned, Leo dithered as the Church sundered.” [153]

Seripando’s critique of Leo for militarism and immorality. [154]

Chapter EIGHTEEN: A Brief Moment of Truth

Adrian VI attacked decadence and halted work on the Basilica.

Chapter NINETEEN: Medici Redux

What princes heard in Luther: “The church, the intercessor between God and man, was redundant, which in practical political terms meant that civil rulers did not have to bow to the higher authority of Rome.” [162]

1527: Charles V’s sack of Rome. [163]

Clement commissioned Michelangelo’s Last Judgment after the sack of Rome. [163]

PART THREE: The Michelangelo Imperative 1546-1626

Chapter TWENTY: A Violent Awakening

Paul III both commissioned Copernicus and reinstated the Inquisition. [172]

Magellan’s voyage as consolation: “The number of souls lost to Protestantism was a drop in the oceans compared with the number of new souls ripe for conversion.” [173]

Paul III had two remarkable answers to counter the Reformation and restore the moral authority of the Church, and he pursued them both with fervor. The first was the Council of Trent. The second Was Michelangelo.” [174]

“Michelangelo, who did not suffer popes gladly...” [177]

Regarding the Last Judgment – “When the pope’s master of ceremonies, Biagio de Cesena, dared to criticize the fresco, Michelangelo painted him as Minos, lord of the underworld, with the ears of an ass and a snake wrapped around him nibbling on his testicles.” [180]

After a decade of controversy, Paul IV ordered Michelangelo’s nudes covered. [180]

“Dante’s Inferno was not an abstraction to Michelangelo; the stakes were real and eternal – salvation or damnation. His art has no palliative vistas to soften the human condition, there is not a flower, a tree, or a landscape of any kind in his frescoes – only us, teeming, struggling, aspiring. His art is in motion, animated by the primordial struggle of spirit with flesh, of man with God, and with himself.” [180]

“Michelangelo lived in anguish and created out of tension.” [181]

Chapter TWENTY-ONE: Julius's Folly

For Paul III, "Completing the Basilica in unparalleled splendor would be an affirmation as deliberate and unabashed as the Council of Trent." [185]

"Romans are famous procrastinators and laggards. If you're in a hurry to have something done, the Eternal City is not the place to be." [186]

"Between 1540 and 1546 [Paul III] poured 162,000 ducats into St. Peter's. A full half of that was the treasure of the Incas brought back to Spain by the conquistadors." [187]

Chapter TWENTY-TWO: Motu Proprio

Regarding Michelangelo: "Like Bramante, he was constantly revising, his design continuously in flux." [196]

No one dared actually raise the dome "until a self-taught swineherd took control of the Church." [202]

Chapter TWENTY-THREE: An Immovable Object

Moving the obelisk – The ropes about to give way – a sailor (even though silence had been enjoined under penalty of death) shouted "Water the ropes?" which salvaged the operation. The sailor's village was rewarded with the privilege of providing the palms for Passion Sunday (which still continues). [207]

Regarding Fontano's concern that his proposal for moving the obelisk was uncertain of success:

"Attentive to every detail to the last, he had had a horse harnessed and waiting at the Leonine wall just in case the operation failed." [208]

Chapter TWENTY-FOUR: The Swineherd who Built Rome

Sixtus reversed the tradition of giving parsons upon his consecration – and ordered beheading as the punishment for crime. [211]

Chapter TWENTY-FIVE: Raising the Dome

How much of the work was done without understanding the principles of physics involved. [220]

"Once when an extra contained was needed for water, a mason commandeered the sarcophagus of Innocent VI and used it as a trough." [223]

Chapter TWENTY-SIX: A New Century

"A mere fifty years after its unity fractured, the Catholic Church was reborn, more confident than ever, but increasingly closed. The resurgent Church became cautious, not humble. Orthodoxy became paramount. What was lost was not munificence but magnanimity – that largeness of spirit that made anything possible, that allowed every voice and every cockmanie idea to be aired. The church that had invented the term *devil's advocate* to raise intellectual challenges became leery of open debate." [227-228]

“... the church of Christ was more distinctly than ever the Church of Rome. Although its embrace was universal, its soul was Latin.” [228]

“The romance of the Baroque was an unabashed appeal to the emotions.” [228]

Chapter TWENTY-SEVEN: The Knaves of St. Peter’s

Chapter TWENTY-EIGHT: 1300 Years Later

PART FOUR: Bernini’s Grand Illusions 1629-1667

Chapter TWENTY-NINE: The Romance of the Baroque

“The baroque infused art with theater, and Bernini was its master.” [246]

“Religion is illusion. No institution understands that more profoundly than the Church of Rome. More than tenets and ethics, religion is mystery and magic, the ultimate conjuring act, body and blood from bread and wine. And the gleam of gold, the clouds of incense, the remote elevated person of the pope, the sacred art and evocative music, create that illusion.” [246]

“The Baroque is to art what opera is to music – the elevation of pathos; a spectacle of color, emotion, and drama; fantasy rising to frenzied ecstasy.” [247]

“The hot, intense Baroque was out to move the masses. It was popular art in the truest sense – cinematic special effects without a camera lens.” [247]

“Bernini trusted his eye more than any geometric measure.” [249]

“So much bronze was taken from the Pantheon that there was enough to complete the columns of the Baldacchino and make eighty pieces of artillery for the papal guards.” [251]

Bernini’s rule of thumb: “He who doesn’t break the rules, achieves nothing.” [253]

Chapter THIRTY: Full Circle

Epilogue

“Gothic cathedrals reach up to heaven. St. Peter’s – muscular, sublime, irrevocable – brings heaven to earth.” [269]