FEDERICO ZUCCARI, GREGORY XIII, AND THE VAULT FRESCOES OF THE CAPPELLA PAOLINA

In 1537 Pope Paul III Farnese commissioned Antonio da Sangallo the Younger to build a new chapel in the Vatican Palace called the Cappella Paolina (fig. 1). Nestled between the Sala Regia and the basilica of St. Peter's, this chapel is among the main ceremonial rooms of the papal palace. The Cappella Paolina assumed both the liturgical and ceremonial functions of its medieval predecessor, the Capella Parva, which originally extended to the west from the Sala Regia.¹

Like most ceremonial rooms of the papal palace, the Paolina was built and decorated to serve a variety of functions. Today the chapel is commonly remembered as the conclave chapel where, up until the election of Urban VIII Barberini (1623–1644), the cardinals gathered to elect the pope.² Nevertheless it should not be forgotten that the primary function was its use as the papal Sacrament Chapel, where the consecrated Host was stored and displayed during the celebration of the Easter Sepulchre and the Forty Hours Devotion.

- The text of this article is largely derived from my dissertation, "The Cappella Paolina: Before and After Michelangelo," written under the direction of K. Weil-Garris Brandt, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University which I am currently preparing as a book manuscript. Essential references are B. Biagetti and F. Baumgart, Gli affreschi di Michelangelo e Lorenzo Sabbatini e Federico Zuccari nella Cappella Paolina in Vaticano, Città del Vaticano 1934; C. L. Frommel, "Antonio da Sangallos Cappella Paolina, Ein Beitrag zur Baugeschichte des Vatikanischen Palastes," Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 27 (1964), 1–42; D. Redig de Campos, I palazzi vaticani, Bologna 1967.
- J. B. Gatticus, Acta selecta caeremonialia sanctae Romanae ecclesia..., Rome, 1753, part I, 352, "Anno 1623 die 18 Julii defuncto Gregorio XV Illustriss. & Rmi DD. Cardinales in Congregationibus decreverunt facere scrutinium pro electione Summi Pontificis intus Capellam Apostolicam Sixti IV., & non in solita Capella Paulina, prout aliis temporibus factum est..."
- Decreta Autentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum, V, Rome 1900, 433. For a discussion of the medieval celebrations, see N. C. Brooks, The Sepulchre of Christ in Art and Liturgy, University of Illinois Stud-

The medieval celebration of the Easter Sepulchre apparatus was revived in 1556 under Pope Paul IV.³ This ceremony called for the construction of an elaborately decorated temporary structure, intended to commemorate Christ's tomb, which housed the consecrated Host, or body of Christ. The celebration of the Easter Sepulchre evoked the time that Christ remained in the tomb, prior to His resurrection. On Holy Thursday, after celebrating Mass in the Cappella Sistina, the pope carried the consecrated Host in procession to the Paolina and "buried" it symbolically in the sepulchre. Following the burial the pope proceeded to the Benediction Loggia of St. Peter's to bless those gathered in the square. The next day, Good Friday, the Eucharist was retrieved from the Cappella Paolina for the Mass of the Presanctified Host celebrated in the Cappella Sistina. The Easter Sepulchre apparatus often included architectural structures, large scale statues, paintings, and precious tapestries and carpets, all of which were illuminated by hundreds of candles and lamps.

The Paolina was also the conclave chapel, where the cardinals would meet to cast their vote for the papal election. Casting of ballots was presided over by the eldest Cardinal Deacon, Cardinal Bishop and Cardinal Presbyter, while the electorate sat around the perimeter of the chapel. After confirmation of a successful vote the newly elected pope was enthroned upon the altar of the Paolina where he received his first obeisance from the cardinalate.⁴

- ies in Language and Literature, VII, no. 2, Urbana 1921; K. Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, Oxford 1951, I, 112–77.
- For a description of the election process and ceremony prior to the changes made by Pope Gregory XV, see M. Dykmans S.I. L'Œuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini ou le cérémonial papal de la première renaissance, Città del Vaticano 1982, I, 98*–108*, 27–52, esp. 43–8; Caeremoniale Electionis Consecrationis ac Coronationis summi Pontificis, ex Caeremoniali Ecclesiae Romanae edito Ventiis apud Juntas 1582, ed. G. Meuschen, Frankfurt 1732, 135–92.



1. View of the Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace

Most previous literature concerning the decoration of the Cappella Paolina has focussed on Michelangelo's frescoes, which occupy the central portions of the lateral walls. The majority of the chapel, however, was decorated in the last quarter of the sixteenth century under Pope Gregory XIII Buoncompani (1572–85). This decorative campaign can be divided into two phases. In the first, 1573–76, Lorenzo Sabbatini painted three wall frescoes, the 'Stoning of Stephen' and the 'Baptism of Paul', which flank Michelangelo's 'Conversion' and the 'Fall of Simon Magus' located to the right of Michelangelo's 'Crucifixion'.5

For the second phase, begun in 1580, Federico Zuccari executed the wall fresco depicting the 'Baptism of Cornelius the Centurion' to the left of Michelangelo's 'Crucifixion'.6 Between 1580–81 and 1583–85, Zuccari decorated the vault with stucco sculpture and a cycle of Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul which surround the central image of 'Paul's Vision of Paradise'. My discussion here focuses on

particular aspects of the iconographic program of the vault executed under Gregory XIII and how it can be understood with respect to the two principal functions of the chapel, the papal conclave and the celebration of the Easter Sepulchre.

The choice of a cycle of Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul served two purposes.⁷ It legitimized the heritage of the papacy, a time-honored theme, and underscored the two main functions of the space which are intrinsically related: one where the body of Christ was stored, the other where His Vicar was chosen. The painted cycle confirms the historical position of the pope, the Vicar of Christ, as temporal and spiritual ruler and is a constant affirmation of the primacy and heritage of the papacy back to Peter and Paul.

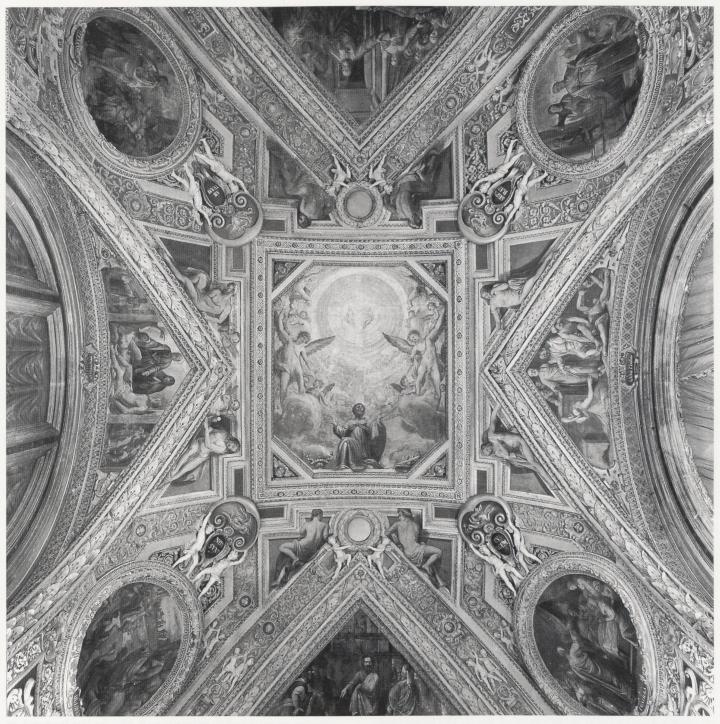
In the 16th century the dual heritage of the papacy was repeatedly demonstrated in prominent ways. The busts of Peter and Paul, for example, decorate the lead stamp used to

See my forthcoming article in *The Burlington Magazine* where I identify two Vasari drawings for a previous decorative program devised by Vincenzo Borghini.

For an illustration of the east wall, see L. Steinberg, Michelangelo's Last Paintings, New York 1975, fig. 43; and for the west wall, see Il Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, ed. C. Pietrangeli, Florence 1992, 70.

For a discussion of the use of standard Eucharistic typologies for the decoration of Sacrament Chapels in the sixteenth century and particularly in the Veneto, see M. Cope, *The Venetian Chapel of the Sacrament in the Sixteenth Century*, New York, London 1979, 176f.

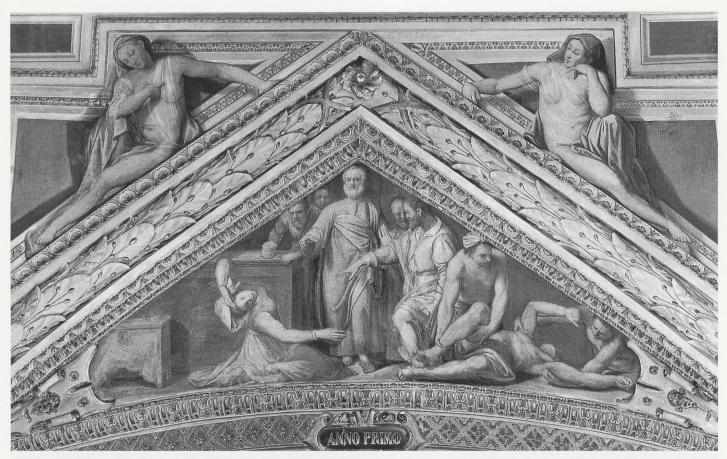
J. Shearman, Raphael's Cartoons In The Collection of Her Majesty The Queen And The Tapestries For the Sistine Chapel, London, New York, 1972, 60, and n. 94, 61 and n. 95, discusses this issue in relation to Raphael's tapestries for the Cappella Sistina.



2. Federico Zuccari, Vault of the Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace

seal all papal bulls. The papal coronation ceremony at the Lateran invoked these associations as well. The newly elected pope was seated sequentially on two porphyry thrones flanking the entrance to the Chapel of St. Sylvester. According to the ceremonial of Patrizi Piccolomini, which was republished during the pontificate of Gregory XIII, the throne to the right symbolized Peter and the one to the left Paul. The double succession of the papacy was also signi-

9 For the actual ceremony at the Lateran, see Dykmans (as note 4), I, 118*, 82; M. Andrieu, Le Pontifical de la Curie romaine au XIII siècle, Città del Vaticano 1940, 282, 358–59. Shearman, 60–61, nn.94–95, discusses the dual heritage of the papacy in relation to Raphael's tapestries and notes, "at this date the preeminence of the Roman Church is derived in great part – at least in argument – from its foundation jointly by the two Princes of the Apostles and from its consecration by their joint martyrdom." According to G. Catalanus, Sacrarum caeremoniarum sive rituum ecclesiasticorum sanctae Romanae ecclesiae libri tres ab Augustino Patricio ordinati et a Mar-



3. Federico Zuccari, Punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, Detail of the Vault of the Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace

fied by the joint burial of the Princes of the Apostles; up to the end of the 17th century it was believed that the high altar of St. Peter's basilica marked the shared tomb of St. Peter and St. Paul who were recognized as the joint patrons of Rome.¹⁰

Reading clockwise, the Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul depicted on the vault of the Cappella Paolina include: 'Peter Raising Tabitha' located above the 'Liberation of

cello ... primum editi ..., commentariis aucti, Rome 1750, I, 137, this ceremony ceased after the pontificate of Leo X. The Caeremoniale Electionis consecrationis ac Coronationis summi Pontificis, (ed. Meuschen, Frankfurt, 1732), 184, of Gregory XIII clearly states the ceremony of the two porphyry thrones was performed in his pontificate. It is important to note that the orientation of these two thrones symbolizing Peter and Paul is the same as that of the frescoes in the Cappella Paolina.

This explains the persistent iconography that dominated the decorations of the high altar of St. Peter's. See Shearman, 75, nn. 168, 169; F. Grimaldi, *Descrizione della Basilica Antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano*, Codex Barb. lat. 2733, ed. R. Niggl, Città del Vaticano 1972, 198f. The Alpharano plan of St. Peter's (c.1589–90) also designates the high altar as the tomb of Peter and Paul; T. Alpharanus, *De Basilicae Vaticanae antiquissima et nova structura*, ed. D. M. Cerrati, Rome 1914, 35–36.

Peter from Prison', 'Peter and John Healing the Cripple before the Temple', 'Peter Punishing Ananias and Sapphira', 'Peter Healing Eneas', 'Paul at the Island of Malta', 'Saints Paul and Barnabas at the Island of Lystra', 'Paul and Silas Imprisoned at Philippi', and finally 'Paul Driving the Evil Spirit from the Maid Servant' (fig. 2). The inclusion of these particular Acts expands ideas expressed by the images on the walls below. They emphasize themes of healing, justice, and mercy administered by Peter and Paul. Collectively these frescoes herald Peter's and Paul's role as models of faith and purveyors of forgiveness and salvation.

The notion of papal primacy can also be understood in relation to the use of the Cappella Paolina as a Sacrament Chapel where Christ, the source of salvation and origin of papal power, was embodied in the form of the consecrated Host. Even a scene of condemnation, the 'Punishment of Ananias and Sapphira' (fig. 3), was commonly understood as representing the excommunication of the unfaithful from the church.¹¹ In the physical and ceremonial context of the

¹¹ C. Kirwin and M. Chappel, "A Petrine Triumph. The Decoration of the *Navi Piccole* in San Pietro under Clement VIII," *Storia dell'Arte*,

4. Federico Zuccari, Paul Bitten by a Viper at the Island of Malta, Detail of the Vault of the Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace



Paolina this scene recalled the papal celebrations for Holy Thursday. After placing the consecrated Host in the Easter Sepulchre the bull In Coena Domini was read, in both Latin and Italian, from the Benediction Loggia of St. Peter's. The bull both excommunicated and expelled all heretics from the church and was symbolically enacted by the pope who, upon the completion of the reading, extinguished a white candle by casting it down into the crowd gathered in the piazza. A papal benediction and plenary indulgence followed. This absolved all present of past sins and and secured their salvation. The cleric Gregory Martin describes the symbolism of the pope's actions as follows, "... when he doeth both geve a benediction to al Catholiks in the world, and pronounceth a malediction and curse and excommunication upon al obstinate Heretikes, and enimies of the Catholike Roman Churche, upon Holy Thursday, which therfore is called Bulla excommunicationis in coena Domini, ... and it is read of one Cardinal in latin, and of an other in Italian, the Pope holding a light taper, which in the end is terribly cast downe to the condemnation of al miscreantes, the people crying with ful consent, God save his Holinesse."12

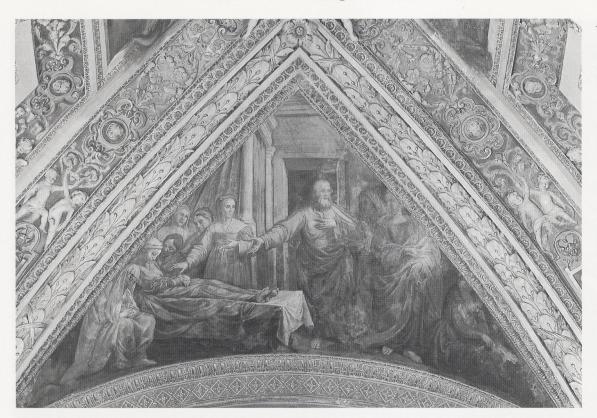
6 (1974), 131–36. Five of the six scenes representing Acts of St. Peter in St. Peter's executed under Clement VIII are among those depicted in the Paolina. For a different interpretation of the Punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, as part of the Sistine tapestry cycle, see Shearman, 63.

G. Martin, Roma Sancta (1581), ed. G. Bruner Parks, Rome 1969, 104. This event is also described in accounts of the papal Master of Ceremonies. See for example, B.A.V., Vat. lat. 12308, 644r.; Chigi,

Although the scene of 'Paul Bitten by a Viper on the Island of Malta' (fig. 4), Acts 28: 1-6, is uncommon in cycles of the Acts of the Apostles, this or the previous event of Paul's shipwreck (Acts 27: 40-44) are prominently represented in three of Gregory XIII's major decorative programs at the Vatican: the Torre dei Venti, the Galleria della Carte Geografiche, and the Cappella Paolina. Ignazio Danti, who provided the iconographic program for the Torre dei Venti, justifies its inclusion and describes the meaning of Paul's Shipwreck as follows: "... I decided to represent the shipwreck of Saint Paul on the west wall: this makes sense given that it followed upon activity that occurred in the eastern regions. I wanted to demonstrate that every evil is spread not only by the North Wind, but also by the winds of the eastern heretics. From apostolic time to the present they have stirred up tumult; they have tried and still try regularly with even greater effort to swamp the sacred little bark under the waves which innumerable storms and tempests move upon the sea of the inviolable, Catholic faith."13

L.II.29, 151r.; Vat. lat. 12315, 211v., for the years 1539, 1574, and 1586. For a summary of the history of the plenary indulgence in relation to the Holy Year, see B. Wisch, "The Roman Church Triumphant: Pilgrimage, Penance and Processions Celebrating the Holy Year of 1575," in *Triumphal Celebrations and the Rituals of Statecraft*, Papers in Art History From the Pennsylvania State University, VI, 1990, 82–117.

For a complete discussion, see N. Courtright, Gregory XIII's Tower of the Winds in the Vatican, Ph.D. Dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1990, 564, as quoted from, I. Danti, O.P., Anemographia ... in anemoscopium Vaticanum horizontale ac averticale instrumentum ostensorem ventorum, B.A.V., Vat. lat., 5647, 15r.



Federico Zuccari,
 Raising of Tabitha,
 Detail of the Vault of the Cappella Paolina,
 Vatican Palace

The subsequent event, Paul Bitten by a Viper, is also represented in the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche. After landing at Malta, Paul stood before a fire preaching when a viper attached itself to his arm. Paul is shown shaking off the viper, unharmed by its venomous bite. The Maltese who had gathered, watch in astonishment and subsequently declared Paul a God. Obviously, this is a reference to salvation through true faith in God. By extension, just as Danti explained Paul's shipwreck as triumph over heretics of the east and north, the viper can also be understood as an allusion to schism. It effectively conveys the power of faith and the church's power to triumph over schismatic heretics. ¹⁴

The image of 'Paul Bitten By a Viper' also has specific relevance to Gregory XIII's political and diplomatic aspirations and abilities. Here art and politics come together. Specifically this scene refers to Gregory XIII as intercessor for the Knights of Malta. Beginning in 1576 Gregory XIII served as mediator for the political battles amongst the members of the order and was instrumental to the election

which emphasizes the triumph of the New Covenant.

freedom from death and also refers to his message to the Hebrews

of the new Grand Master.¹⁵ Just as Paul was able to overcome schism, so too, Gregory XIII was able to reconcile and reunite the order and thus secure Catholicism at Malta.

The scenes which represent spiritual healing, which is achieved through penance, are best understood with respect to the ceremonial context of the Easter celebrations. In the 16th century Holy Saturday was one of two days reserved for Baptism, the principal form of healing. Gregory Martin, explains that through "baptisme we are buried and rise againe with Christ, and that our sanctification therby and confirmation afterward are both of the Holy ghost." The association of Easter and Baptism is recognized by St. Paul and is repeated throughout his writings. Baptism was a reenactment of the passion, death, and resurrection of

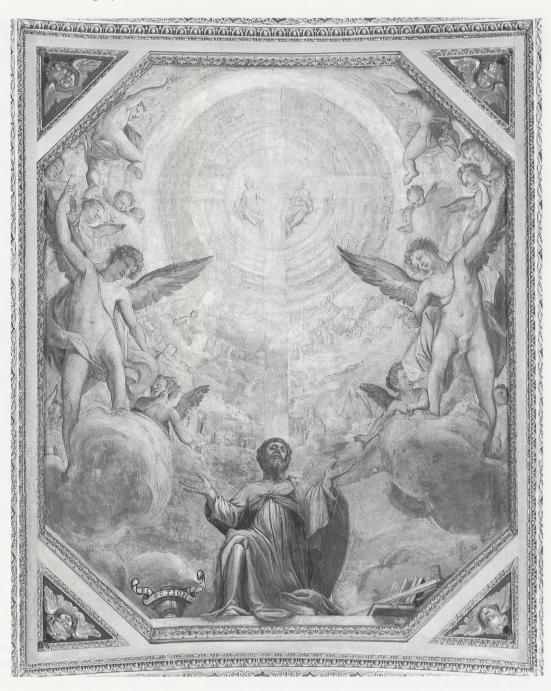
L. Eleen, The Illustration of the Pauline Epistles in French and English Bibles of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Oxford 1982, 114f., suggests that Paul's double escape on Malta is a prototype of

J. P. Maffei, Degli annali di Gregori XIII. Pontefice Massimo, Rome 1742, I, 252f.; L. von Pastor, The History of the Popes, London 1923–53, XIX, 116. Avvisi concerning the political position of Malta and the instrumental role of Gregory XIII are also found throughout the year 1582, see B.A.V., Urb. lat., 1050, 48r, 225r-v. See also the manuscript by Niccolo Grimaldi, entitled, "Discorso come si posci defender L'Isola di Malta dall'armata Turchesca," (B. A.V., Buoncompagni, F25).

¹⁶ Martin (as note 12), 83.

Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:3–11. For a discussion of these notions, see J. Daniélou, S.J., *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966, 43–44, and 46f. for additional texts.

6. Federico Zuccari, St. Paul Adoring the Trinity, Detail of the Vault of the Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace



Christ, the recreation of man in the image of God. The actual baptismal rite, the triple immersion in holy water, also invoked Christ's burial for three days.

The scenes of healing in the form of resuscitation, such as the 'Raising of Tabitha' (fig. 5), are references to both Christ's Resurrection and His own actions. Lazarus, raised by Christ, was a type for all sinners and his resurrection symbolized the remission of sins achieved through penance. Thus, by extension all scenes of healing were models of penance. Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory XIII's model and namesake, included penance as the fifth of five forms of Baptism, "... and I know of a Fifth also, which is that of

tears, and is much more laborious, received by him who washes his bed every night and his couch with tears...."¹⁸ The interdependence of the themes of penance and Baptism

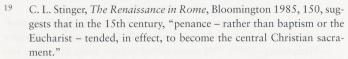
Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, ser. 2, 7, 358, Gregory Nazianzus' "Orations on the Holy Light". Gregory XIII's veneration for Gregory Nazianzus (c.330-c.390) was manifest in many ways. His image was included among the four doctors of the church represented in the pendentives of the Cappella Gregoriana, in St. Peter's, and when his remains were transferred there on 11 June 1580 from Santa Maria in the Campus Martius, they were given the position of honor in the main altar of the chapel.



7. Federico Zuccari, St. Paul, Detail of the Vault of the Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace

gives the program a third aspect which binds the seemingly disparate scenes. ¹⁹ Penance was essential prior to receiving Christ in the form of the Eucharist. The Lateran Council of 1225 established Easter as the only day that Catholics were obligated to receive communion. ²⁰ The thematic connection between Baptism, penance, Easter and the Eucharist would have been evident to all who entered the chapel.

The decorative program of the Cappella Paolina focuses on the central functions of the space, where the Eucharist is stored and buried in the Easter Sepulchre on Holy Thursday, and where the new pope is elected, in essence being reborn as the Vicar of Christ and thus confirming the notion of papal primacy. This imagery is made explicit by the ceremo-



R. Fereville, Latran I, II, III et Latran IV, Histoire des conciles oecumaniques, 6, Paris 1965, 278, 298f., 357f., as cited in J. Freiberg, "Lateran Patronage of Gregory XIII and the Holy Year 1575," Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 57 (1991), 82, n.67. To my knowledge Baptisms were not performed in the Paolina.



8. Francesco Piranesi, Pope Pius VI Adoring the Eucharist in the Cappella Paolina, 1787

nial placement of the newly chosen pope on the altar – the place where the body of Christ, the origin of the papacy, is stored – to receive the first adoration from the cardinalate.²¹

The fresco at the center of the vault represents St. Paul kneeling in adoration of the Cross with an image of the Trinity at its center (fig. 6). Emanating from the Trinity are rings of angels. Biagetti and Baumgart identified the small figures in the heavens as follows: just beyond Paul on the left is St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr; on the right, kneeling and holding the staff, is John the Baptist; near by, Adam is seating himself, and between them is Eve. In the center are the first men raised from Limbo. The authors conclude that the composition is a completely new iconography and an

Dykmans (as note4), I, 50, "... illumque sedere faciunt super altare, cui cardinales omnes reverentiam exhibent per ordinem, pedes, manum et os deosculantes." Gatticus, I, 304, 309, 316, 325, 328, 336.

example of the spiritual renewal in sacred art of the second half of the sixteenth century.²²

Generally described as "Paul's Vision of Paradise" the central fresco of the vault serves as the unifying element for the painted program. Paul is identified by his sword on the right and the vessel, an obvious allusion to Paul's Baptism by Ananias (*Acts*, 9:15), depicted on the wall below, and his role as God's "vas electionis", or "chosen vessel", to preach the word of the Lord. Furthermore, the vessel is decorated with a banderole which reads "electionis", an explicit reference to the function of the chapel for papal elections (fig. 7). This image confirms the Pauline mission and heritage of all popes, and thus functions as a mandate to all future popes.

Zuccari's fresco has added significance as a visualization of Paul's second Epistle to the Philippians. Paul's letter summarizes Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, which are the essence of the Easter ceremonies. *Philippians 2:* 10–11, reads: "That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father." This citation surely inspired the depiction of Paul on bent knee. The fact that this passage was read on Palm Sunday to herald the first day of Holy Week is compelling evidence of the connection between liturgy and art.²⁴

In 1592 Pope Clement VIII mandated the Devotion of the Forty Hours be a continuous prayer throughout the city of Rome; when it ended in one church it began in another.²⁶ To inaugurate the annual celebration, each year on the first Sunday of Advent the Forty Hours Devotion was celebrated in the Paolina. The Paolina was a logical place to initiate the annual celebration as it was the same chapel used for the Easter Sepulchre. The synonymous qualities of the ceremonies was underscored by the use of the same setting and is clearly illustrated much later by Francesco Piranesi's print of 1787 (fig. 8). Pope Pius VI kneels adoring the Host in the Cappella Paolina. This print serves to demonstrate the continuity of traditions sacred to this space. The pope's actions correspond to the text of Paul's Epistle, St. Paul depicted on the vault, and the trains of worshippers who entered the Paolina to adore the Eucharist for the Easter Sepulchre and the Forty Hours Devotion each year.

From the diaries of Gregory XIII's Masters of Ceremonies we know that on Holy Thursday the pope would return to the Paolina to adore the Eucharist within the Easter Sepulchre. ²⁵ The message is clear; like St. Paul and his successors we too should kneel to adore Christ in the form of the consecrated Host, stored or displayed on the altar below. These same practices were adopted for the Devotion of the Forty Hours.

²² Biagetti and Baumgart (as note 1), 62, also state that the last row of figures are prophets and sibyls.

The full passage that is read on Palm Sunday is *Philippians* 2: 5–11.

Missale Romanum Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concili Tridentini Restitutum. Pii V. Pont. Max. Jussu Editum..., Antwerp 1728, 149, 170, 177, the passage read in Wednesday of Holy Week is Phil. 2: 10, 8, 11, and on Holy Thursday the preceding line, Phil. 2: 8–9, are recited. Regarding the text for Wednesday, see O. B. Hardison, Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages. Essay in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama, Baltimore 1965, 116. For Palm

Sunday, see also D. J. Mabillon, *Museum Italicum...*, Paris 1724, I, 332.

²⁵ B. A.V., Buoncompagni, C5, 154r, 253r, 372v, for the years 1574f.

Bullarum diplomaticum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum. Taurinenesis editio..., IX, Turin 1857–72, 644–6. This bull is partially translated into Italian by A. De Santi, L'orazione della Quarant'ore e i tempi di calamità e di guerra, Milan 1919, 183 ff and 195 ff, for the rules which governed the celebration. For the manuscript version of the Clementine rules, see B.A.V., Vat. lat., 12317, 377r–380.