

THE REBUILDING OF ST. PETERS BASILICA AND THE VATICAN PALACE. (Cont.)

Julius II. (Cont.)

The surface of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel covered by the paintings of Michaelangelo measures 10,000 square feet with interesting curves and lunettes, presenting difficulties for the artist. Three hundred and forty three figures filled the space in every imaginable position, attitude and form of foreshortening, some 12 feet high, and the prophets and sybils about 18 feet high, with every detail painted true to nature, even to the hair of the head and beard, the fingernails and creases in the soles of the feet. In August, 1511, Julius II returned to Rome and saw it for the first time.

Michaelangelo began the cartoons for the remaining interspaces and in October, 1512, the painting was finished, Form and not color was always the main consideration of the work. Today after 400 years the painting still arouses admiration. The sculptor shows through the painter. The ceiling paintings carry out the idea of those on the walls. The walls show the triple division of the Plan of Salvation of the Middle Ages: The Giving of the Law; the Law; the grace of the Kingdom of Christ. The left wall with the life of Moses represented the Law. The right wall with the life of Christ represents the reign of Grace. The period before the Law, from Creation to the Deluge, was the theme taken by Michaelangelo. He sees the Creation as motion. God, at first alone, calls the heaven and earth into existence, the worlds of spirits and matter; divides light from darkness; creates Adams body, endows it with a soul; creates Eve and gives her life.

Then follow the temptation and fall of man, his expulsion from Eden. The Deluge, the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, followed by Noah and his sons. These nine paintings form the central part of the decoration. The Prophets and Sybils painted on the descending curve of the vault number 12, five on each side and one at each end, as prophets of the Messiah. The most celebrated of these are Isaias, Jeremias, Ezechias, Daniel, the Delphic and the Lybian Sybils. A third series of pictures occupying the arches and triangular spaces, show the ancestors of Christ in simple family scenes. A fourth, at the four corners, shows the miraculous deliverances of Israel as types of the redemption. To these were added a world of ideal figures intended to give the ceiling a festival effect.

The Old Testament is depicted as a preparation for the New and abiding Covenant between God and man- the Creation, the Fall of Man, the yearning of the human race for deliverance which is foretold by the prophets and sybils. Salvation is prefigured in the conquest of enemies who would destroy the chosen people.



Raphael.

Self Portrait.

(Photo- Fratelli Alinari- Florence)

Raphael was endowed with a sweet disposition and great personal beauty. In 1504 he arrived in Florence and his genius began to expand under Leonardo da Vinci and Fra Bartolomeo. In 1508 he appeared at Rome, aged 26, and was employed by Julius II in the decoration of the Vatican Palace. Julius had chosen as his residence the now-called Stanze of Raphael. In the Autumn of 1508 Perugino, Sodoma, Luca Signorelli, Bramantino, Bernadino Pinturicchio, Suardi, Lorenzo Letto and Johan Ruysch were all working together with Raphael. When Julius II saw his work, all the others were discharged and Raphael alone assigned to the work because of his superior talent. The importance and excellence of his frescoes can be judged by the amount of literature written about them.

Camera Della Segnatura. On the ceiling appear Theology, Poetry, Philosophy and Justice, represented by female figures. Each indicates the theme of the picture on the adjoining wall. The wall depicting Justice contains two pictures divided by a window- Law in the State and Law in the Church. Justinian gives the Pandects to Tribonian in one and in the other Gregory IX (with features of Julius II) gives his Decretals to the Advocate of the Consistory. Both these designs were used in the Juridical Congress stamps of Vatican.



Justinian Gives the Pandects to Tribonian.  
by Raphael. Camera Della Segnatura.  
(Photo- Fratelli Alinari. Florence)

The glories of Poesy are depicted in the Parnassus on the wall dedicated to Poetry. The School of Athens commemorates Philosophy in the two central figures of Plato and Aristotle, surrounded by other philosophers. The wall dedicated to Theology contains the Disputa del Sacramento, glorifying the Holy Eucharist as the supreme pledge of love given by God to man. Because of the multitude of books in these pictures, it is evident that this room was to be used as a library.

Stanza D'Eliodoro. In the decoration of this room, Raphael used his pupil, Giulio Romano, as assistant. Baldassare Peruzzi had already painted four scenes from the old Testament on the ceiling. Raphael retained these and on the walls painted the Miracle of Bolsena, the Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple, the Deliverance of St. Peter from Prison, the Meeting of Leo I and Attila at Mincio near Mantua (depicted on two values of the stamps of the Council of Chalcedon). The Expulsion of Heliodorus is interpreted by some as referring to the restoration to health of Julius II in 1511, to negotiate the Holy League which expelled France from Italy. The meeting of Leo I and Attila is seen by others as referring to the defeat and flight of the French in 1512 and their final defeat in 1513 near Novara.

The Deliverance of Peter is seen as a reference to the deliverance of Leo X as Cardinal Medici from the hands of the French at the Battle of Ravenna. Both these paintings were finished under Leo X.



Gregory IX Gives Decretals to Advocate of the Consistory. Raphael. Camera Della Segnatura.

(Photo- Fratelli Alinari. Florence)

Two of Raphael's pupils, Giovanni da Udine and Perino del Vaga, carried out similar decorations on the ceilings of the Appartamento Borgia. The works of Raphael for the Hall of the Palefreiri and the corridor leading to the Belvedere were painted over by Taddeo Zucchro. The corridor was destroyed under Clement VII. The last work of Raphael was the Transfiguration, related in Matthew, XVII, 2. This, with the Sistine Madonna are considered his best efforts.

(Pastor VI, pp 461-607. VIII pp 281-294)

Stanza Del Incendio. This was commissioned by Leo X in 1514 and completed in 1517. The Fire in the Borgo recalls a story in the Liber Pontificalis of Leo IV who extinguished the fire in the Borgo by making the Sign of the Cross, seen as an allusion to Leo X's zeal for the Crusade and his escape from Saracen pirates at Ostia. The Oath of Purgation against False Accusation recalls such an oath taken by Leo III, Dec. 23, 800, in St. Peters. The Coronation of Charlemagne, by Raphael's pupils, in which Charlemagne is Francis I, is interpreted by some to refer to Leo X's approval of Francis' attempt to gain the imperial crown.

Stanza di Costantino. Depicted here are events in the life of Constantine, the work in the most part of the pupils of Raphael - Victory at the Milvian Bridge; The Vision of the Fiery Cross; The Donation of Constantine; The Baptism of Constantine. While the pupils were at work on these paintings, Raphael was at work designing his famous tapestries which were woven in Flanders. (Freedom from Hunger Set, 1963, Miraculous Draught of Fishes).

The Loggie of Raphael. The arcade on the middle floor of the Vatican Palace opening on the Stanze has 13 small domes, each with four paintings. These represent scenes from the Old and New Testament. Raphael took small part in painting these, but many think that Giovanni da Udine is responsible for most of them. Yet the series of 48 pictures is called Raphael's "Bible".