BORROMINI'S CHURCH of SANT' IVO alla SAPIENZA

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"Transcending specific analogies,
I saw more and more clearly
how much beauty lies in a place
where matter encounters different
meanings:
nothing can be beautiful,
not a person, a thing, or a city,
if it signifies only itself."
Aldo Rossi, A Scientific Autobiography

La petite église baroque de Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza (Rome) conçue par Borromini, est chargée de signification dans tous les aspects de sa conception. L'article qui suit retrace le sens des formes et de l'ornementation choisies par Borromini et révèle toute la profondeur de la considération et du sens de l'oeuvre, d'une certaine manière inconcevable pour l'architecte d'aujourd'hui.

Meaning in architecture: the more architects pursue it, the more it seems to elude them.

The study of architecture today involves exposure to countless apparent alternatives to solving the problem. "Form is function", "ornament is a crime", "less is more", "less is a bore". Consider history, consider typology. Consider topology, morphology, ideology, mythology. Consider formalism, rationalism, structuralism, symbolism, functionalism. Consider the presence of absence and the absence of presence.

Consider truth.

The quest for meaning in architecture is futile unless architects stop looking for meaning as such and start looking for something else. Meaning is the result of something other than itself. Happiness is not what makes us happy. Love or comfort or wealth or beauty or hard work is. Meaning is not what makes architecture meaningful, truth is.

Although architectural truth, like poetic truth, is difficult if not impossible to define in formal terms, its presence in a work is unmistakable. For architectural truth to be present in a work, the architect, like the poet, must have something to say, and he must say it well. And when the truth of what is said becomes inseparable from how it is said, poetry results: in words, in masonry, in wood or in steel.

The object lesson considered here is Borromini's church of Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza in Rome, a small centralized church which is one of the masterpieces of the Italian Baroque, and which, unlike other Baroque masterpieces -- notably Bernini's - - relies on purely architectural means for the embodiment of its infinitely complex, rich, and tightly-woven tapestry of poetic truth.

Francesco Borromini was appointed architect to the University of Rome, known as the Sapienza, in September 1632. The foundation stone of Sant' Ivo was laid in January 1643.[1] It can therefore be assumed that, although Borromini was engaged in other major projects[2] during this period, his ideas for Sant' Ivo had over a decade to mature.

Given his monkish habits, his single-minded devotion to architecture and his legendary powers of concentration,[3] it seems extremely likely that although his days may have been spent on site at San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane or at the Oratory of San Filippo Neri, his evenings during those years were spent reading, drawing and thinking about the temple of wisdom to be built at the eastern end of the courtyard of the Sapienza.

The project was undoubtedly one of great personal significance. Encumbered with a melancholy temperament, a destructive temper (he once had a workman at San Giovanni in Laterano literally beaten to death), and an anxious, anti-social personality; consumed with jealousy for his successful rival and temperamental opposite, Bernini,[4] Borromini was a man whose pursuit of wisdom appears at once poignant and heroic. Yet pursue wisdom he did.

As evidence we have the bust of the stoic philosopher Seneca listed in the inventory[5] of his belongings made at the time of his death as well as a library of 1000 volumes (their titles, unfortunately, uncatalogued) and a "curious bibelot in the form of a snail's shell mounted on a brass pedestal".[6] The spiral configuration of this last object has many symbolic connotations, not the least of which is the search for knowledge.

These possessions may seem insufficient evidence for the assertion that Borromini was obsessed with the pursuit of wisdom, but we must recall that 1000 books represented a vast personal library in the mid 17th century, and as Rudolph Wittkower points out, there was nothing arbitrary about Borromini's life.[7] The posthumous inventory also lists a bust of Michelangelo, whom Borromini is known to have revered, and two portraits of Pope Innocent X Pamphili, the only pope to give Borromini sympathetic support. Even his clothing -- he wore black and dressed in the Spanish style, like Philip II of Spain -- appears to have been chosen as evidence of his saturnine temperament and of his pro-Spanish leanings.[8]

The externals of Borromini's life were of great significance. It is inconceivable that the books, the bust of Seneca and the snail's shell were acquired simply for the interior decoration of the sparsely-furnished suite of rooms he occupied near the church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini in Rome.

One can readily imagine him, crushed by the burden of distasteful spiritual baggage which he cannot dispose of and longs to learn to carry with grace (with stoic detachment and wisdom), planning the church of Sant' Ivo in the spirit of a Hermetic magus practicing sympathetic magic,[9] carefully manipulating symbols, emblems and images in order to bring wisdom down from the heavens to where he sits in anguish.

From its initial conception, Sant' Ivo was to be a temple of wisdom. The earliest of Borromini's plans bears an inscription in the architect's own hand of these words from the Book of Proverbs: "Wisdom has built herself a house -- she has erected seven columns -- she has laid her table".[10] This plan shows an apse behind the altar, with seven columns arranged in a semi-circle. Among Borromini's last drawings for the church, are those reproduced as plates XVIII and XIX of the Opera del Caval. Francesco Borromino, which show the front elevation bearing an inscription referring to Sant' Ivo as aedes sapientiae or temple of wisdom. The inscription is dated 1660, the year the church was consecrated.

Borromini based his designs on circles and triangles,[11] he had done so at San

Carlino, and he did so again at Sant' Ivo. The use of geometry in the 17th century was at once metaphysical, mystical, magical and poetic. The neo-Platonism of the Renaissance coupled with what Frances Yates calls the "reign of Hermes Trismegistus",[12] combined with the geometry of Christian and Jewish symbolism gave every geometric figure cosmic resonance. The architect, wielder of the compass, was the wielder of a mystical tool.

In his Articuli adversos mathematicos (Prague, 1588)[13] the maverick hermetist Giordano Bruno maintains that, "first and last" (praecipuas atque finales)[14], just as there are two kinds of lines, curved and straight, so are there two basic geometrical figures, the circle and the triangle. Manipulation of circles and triangles create figures which in turn yield knowledge of first and last things.

One of the figures so generated is the so-called figura intellectus (Fig. 1) in whose configuration one may readily decipher the double triangle, the star of Solomon. This star or "seal" of Solomon as it is called in hermetic lore, is also the star of David and it is one of the generating figures of Sant' Ivo's ground plan (Fig. 2). Whether or not Borromini was actually familiar with Bruno's work, his appreciation of the power of geometry can be seen as having been similar to Bruno's. Furthermore Bruno's figura intellectus helps to unlock the mystery of there being seven pillars of wisdom in a church whose plan has ostensibly only six bays.

Bruno's figure shows six circles of equal size forming a ring, while a seventh occupies the space at the centre.

The apse with its seven columns disappeared after the design went beyond its first phase but, with the figura intellectus in mind, one can look at the later versions of the plan and clearly read six circumferential pillars of wisdom with a seventh at their centre. Look at the plan of the drum with the lantern plan superimposed on it, as it appears on an original drawing at the Albertina in Vienna. Look at plate X of the Opera with its reflected ceiling plan (Fig. 3). It is impossible not to see seven circles in these drawings. Seven pillars of wisdom, originally decorating an apse not really integral to the plan, later became part of the very fabric of the church itself, articulating
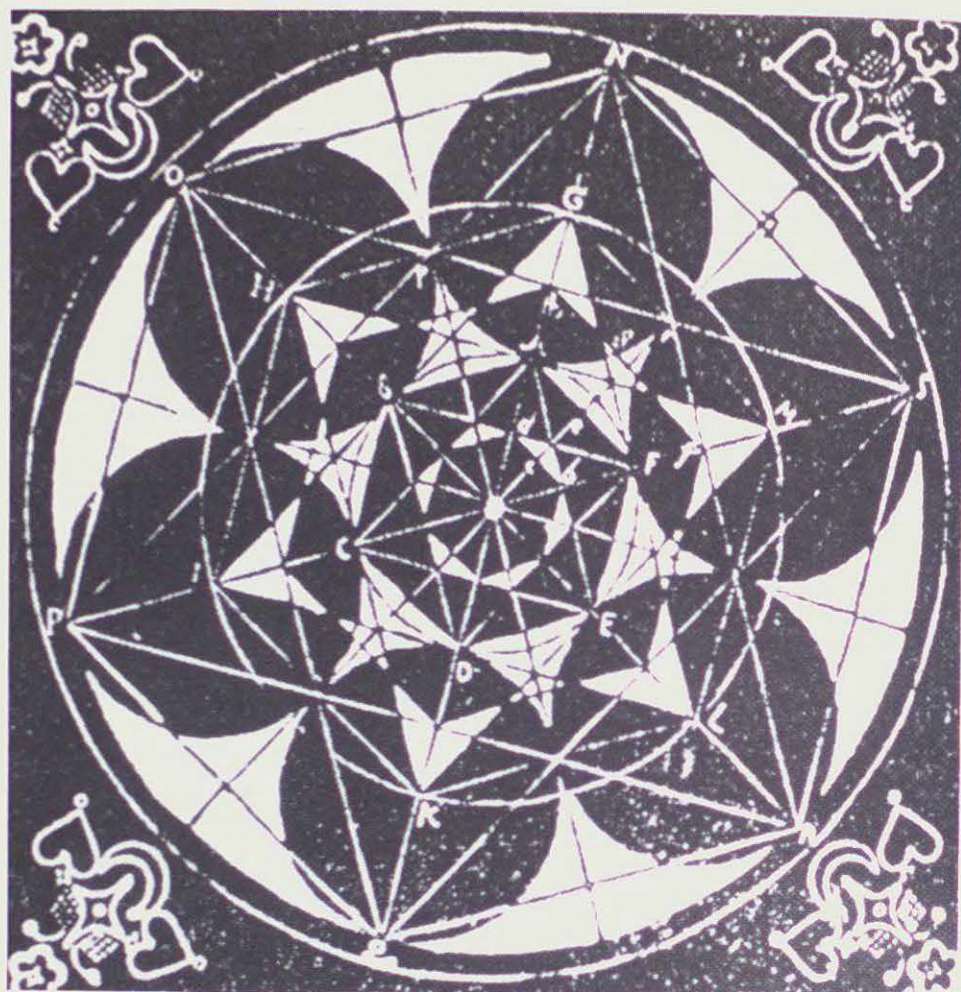
its interior spaces and defining its exterior form.

At ground level, the walls of the six bays which define the interior of the church swing from concave to convex, their rhythm forcefully stressed by the entablature, above which level the whole plan pulls upward and inward to form the dome. The main axis of the church, which, as Anthony Blunt points out, is vertical, pierces the dome at its summit. Here, as wisdom's seventh pillar, it is crowned inside the lantern by a ring of flame, God's glory[15]. At the centre of this ring hovers the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and from its periphery fall pentecostal brands of fire, destined for the heads of the twelve apostles, which were to have been enshrined in twelve niches designed for that purpose.

The level of the entablature on the interior corresponds to where the drum begins on the exterior. Thus an immense thickness of buttressing masonry fills the space between interior and exterior perimeters, since the dome curves inward on the

interior, while the drum rises vertically on the exterior. Borromini's use of a drum to buttress his dome finds precedent in the Pantheon (whose stepped dome roof he also adapts to his own ends here), as well as in Lombardy, the province where he was born and trained as a stone mason. Borromini's
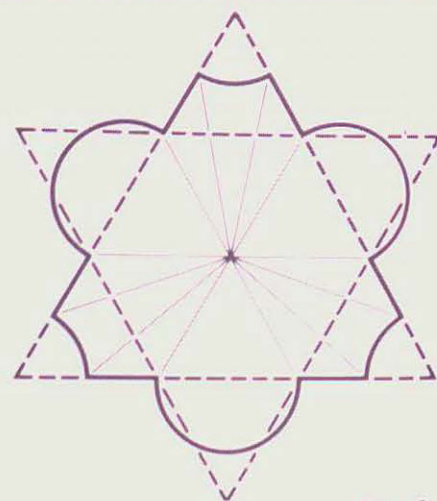

Fig. 1
Bruno's figura intellectus,
from Yates' Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition.
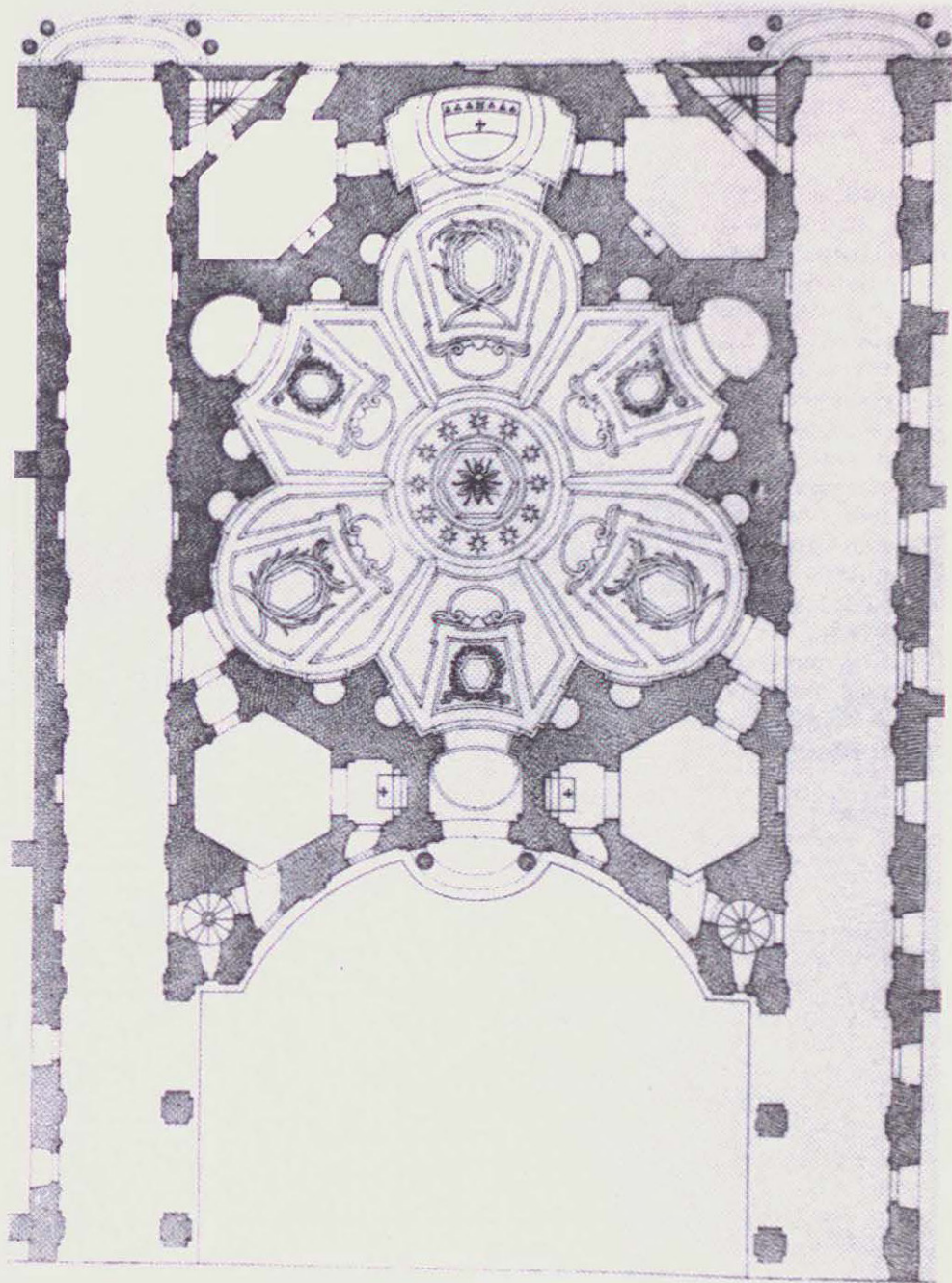

Fig. 2
Plan geometry,
Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza.

Fig. 3
Dome plan of Sant' Ivo,
plate X. Opera del Caval. Francesco Boromino.

determination to have the church constructed on seven columns, however, supercedes these admittedly important structural considerations. By handling the drum the way he did, the seven columns implicit inside the church become explicit on its exterior, with six of them forming the drum while the lantern, or tempietto as he called it, topped by his celebrated tower spiraling up to heaven, becomes the seventh.

Evidence seems to indicate that the church spire owes its form to an engraving by Martin van Heemskerck, one of a series illustrating, in this case, the eight (not seven) wonders of the ancient world.[16] The engraving in question, published in 1572, is of the city of Babylon, whose most prominent feature is a tower -- none other than the Tower of Babel (Fig. 4). In the context of Sant' Ivo, where, as we shall see, the symbolism of Christian redemption is fundamental, Borromini's spire, the most prominent feature of his church, proclaims a tower of Babel redeemed. When the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, they were blessed (not cursed, as at Babel) with the gift of tongues. By permitting speech with all nations Pentecost undid Babel, redeemed it. Through this redemption what had been a tower of human folly became a tower of wisdom.[17]

There are seven pillars of wisdom. There are also seven gifts of the holy spirit.[18]

In Christian theology (and one must remember that although Borromini may have been something of a hermetist and was probably a stoic, he was absolutely a Christian) the three persons of the trinity, whose symbol, not coincidentally, is a triangle, are: God the father, who is the God of strength and creative power; Jesus Christ, who is the God of love; and the Holy Spirit, who is the God of intelligence.[19] Chief among the Spirit's seven gifts is the gift of wisdom.

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit crowns the interior of the church. The Spirit's image, surrounded by flamboyant rays and ringed by the circle of eternal perfection is also emblazoned on the front facade. Its position near the entablature of the drum, places it above a relief of the Lamb of the Apocalypse, who is Christ, and between a pair of "chrismata" which flank it on either side. The chrisma[20] is the monogram of Christ, composed of the greek letters chi and rho, the first two letters of "Christ" superimposed (see Fig. 5).
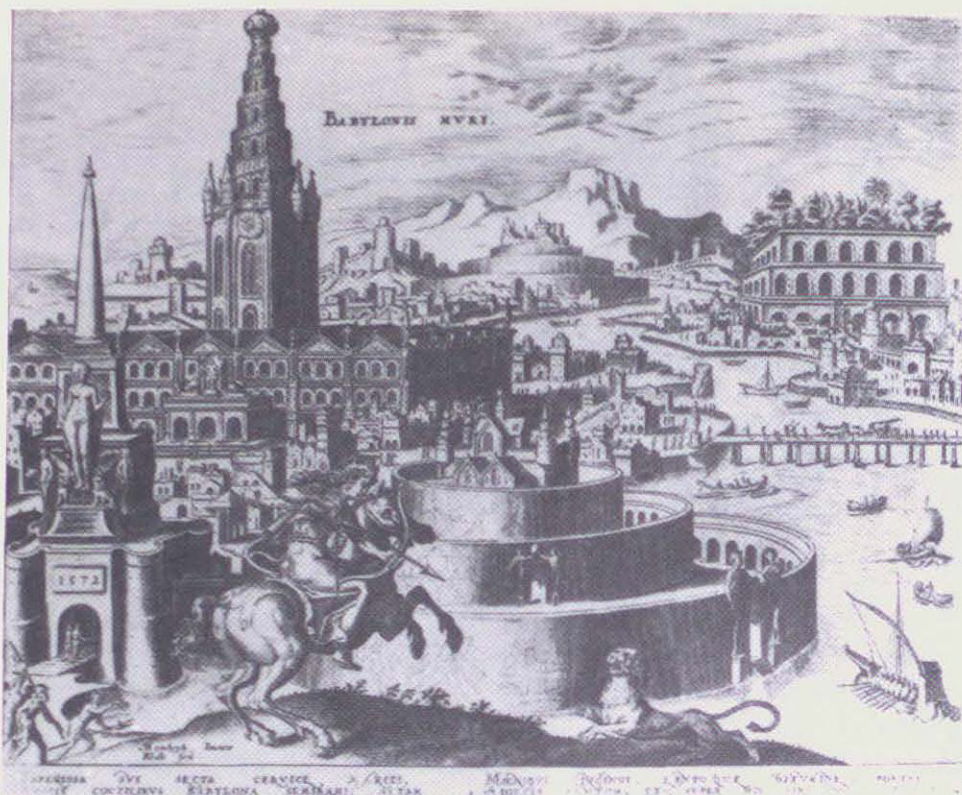
Fig. 4

Martin van Heemskerck's engraving of the city of Babylon, from Duclaux, "Dessins de Martin van Heemskerck".

It is possible, as Paolo Portoghesi[21] has done, to overlay the chrisma on the ground plan of Sant' Ivo, and in fact this superimposition is justified by Borromini's own drawings. Plate IX of the Opera (Fig. 6) a sectional perspective looking towards the entrance of the church, shows the construction lines of the ground plan reduced to four axes and a circle. Their configuration clearly evokes the chrisma combined with the conventional Christian cross.

There is another monogram for Christ's name. It is composed of the Greek letter iota, the first letter of Jesus, and again, the chi for Christ. This monogram reads as a circle equally divided by three axes.[23] Plate VIII of the Opera (Fig. 6), a sectional perspective looking towards the altar, shows this figure overlaid on its ground plan. Twice Borromini's own drawings make deliberate reference to the name of God the son, in a ground plan whose form, as we noted, is carried up unbroken to the top of the dome where it is gathered into circle of eternity.

Christian belief declares the blood of Jesus Christ to be what the words of the mass describe as the "blood of the new and everlasting covenant" which has replaced the ancient covenant made between God and the Jewish people. The Christian sees the New Testament as a fulfillment of the Old. In the floor plan of Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza we see Christ's name superimposed on the star of David.

A dialogue between the numbers six and eight is established in plan by the six-pointed Star and Christian monogram on the one hand and the eight-pointed chrisma-cross emblem on the other. This dialogue was again stressed when the floor of the church was paved in 1660. Anthony Blunt[23] devotes nearly two pages of his book on Borromini trying, and finally failing, to find convincing formal reasons for Borromini's use of an octagonal paving pattern on a floor that was so emphatically hexagonal. Blunt fails because there are no formal reasons, only symbolic ones.

The hexagon implicit in the six-pointed star symbolizes both the Creator and his creation.[24] One reason for this is suggested by God's creation having taken six days to reach completion. The eight-sided figure, and hence the eight-pointed star, symbolizes regeneration. Baptisteries and baptismal fonts are traditionally octagonal due to this regenerative symbolism. There is a very important precedent in Borromini's own work for combining six
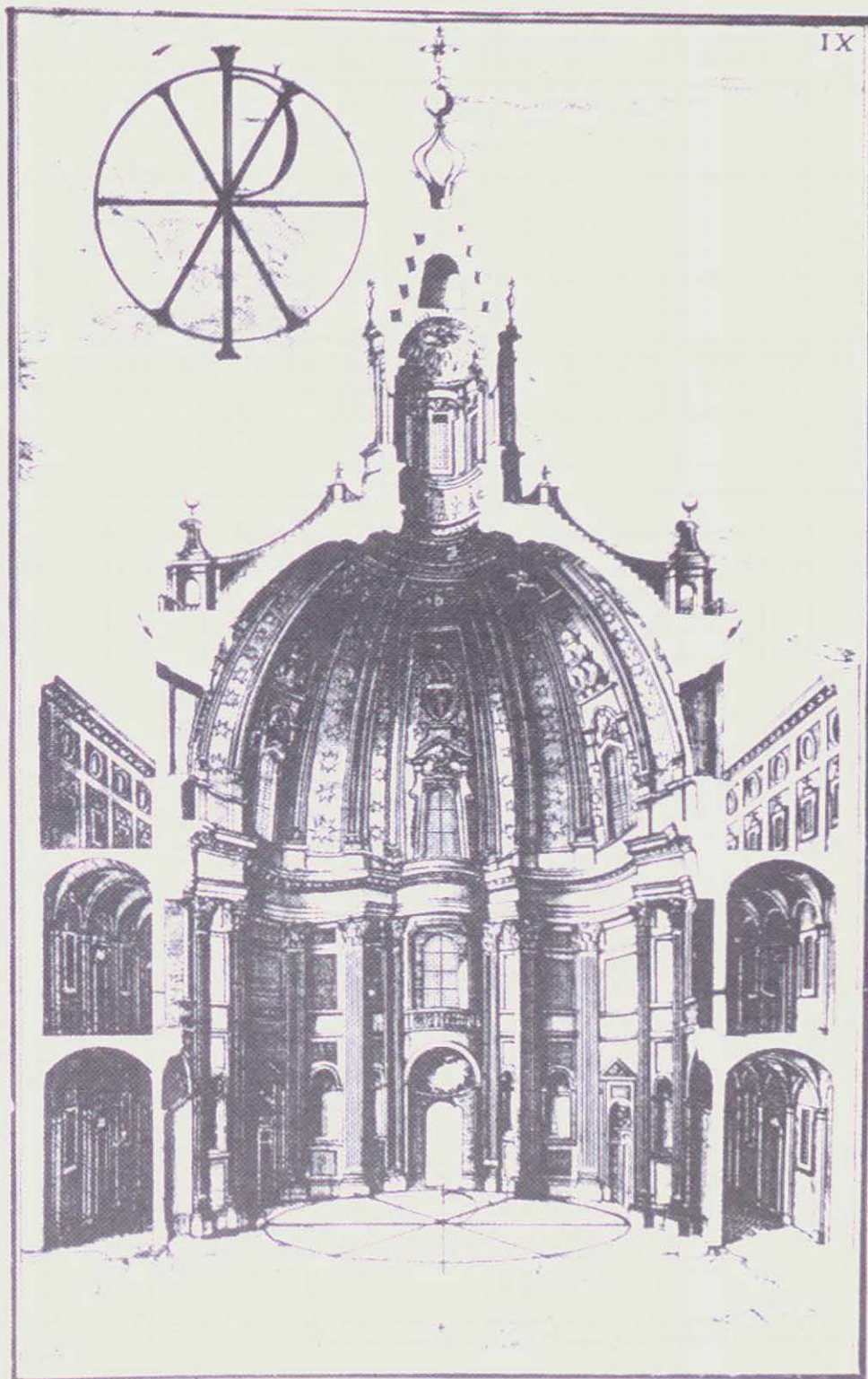
Fig. 5
Sectional perspective looking toward the entrance
with superimposed chrisma, plate IX, Opera.

and eight-sided figures in symbolic colloquy. The coffering inside San Carlino's oval dome is an intricate pattern of hexagons and octagons linked by crosses. An enlightened reading of these coffers reveals creation regenerated through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

At Sant' Ivo, where the link with San Carlino is reinforced by the prominence given the Holy Spirit who crowns the interiors of both churches, the dialogue between six and eight is repeated in the alternation of six and eight-pointed stars which climb the interior of the dome up to the base of the lantern (Fig. 5 & 6). The six-pointed stars are Solomon's, David's and the Creator's; the eight-pointed ones, stars of regeneration and redemption, are those of Christ. Plate XXXVI of the Opera shows a cross growing from the last star, David's, in the alternating sequence. As the genealogy at the beginning of St. Matthew's gospel goes to some lengths to establish, Jesus was born of the house of David, and as we have seen, the blood of his cross sealed the covenant which replaced that made with David's race. The twelve stars in the ring which circle the dome's summit are all eight-pointed, all Christ's.

As noted earlier, the figure of the plan continues unbroken up through the dome where it is gathered into a circle, giving, in the view of some critics[25] a tent-like aspect to the entire church. Its walls seem to fall about one like a rich fabric, hanging regally in stiff, emblem-encrusted folds. It is almost certainly no coincidence that the first tabernacle of Judeo-Christian tradition, the very first house for God on earth, was Moses' tabernacle in the desert, and it was a tent.

The tabernacle described in Exodus (25-31) with exact measurements given in cubits, if reconstructed[26], looks more like a draped shoe box than the fabulous tent which is Sant' Ivo. It is my belief that the tent Borromini imagined as having been Moses' tabernacle looked more like the one illustrated in Heinrich Khunrath's Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae (1609; Fig. 7) than anything measureable in Old Testament cubits. It is of considerable interest to note that the general outlines of Khunrath's tent correspond to the general outlines of Sant' Ivo, that the alchemist

kneeling before it is seeking divine wisdom, and that on the table beside him is a "curious bibelot in the shape of snail's shell" mounted on a pedestal.

Like Moses before him King David too housed the ark of the covenant in a tent. The words of Psalm 27, said to be David's, convey something of the power of that image: a resonance these words would have had for Borromini who must have known them well.

"... One request I have ever made of the Lord, let me claim it still, to dwell in the Lord's house my whole life long, resting content in the Lord's goodness, gazing at his temple. In his royal tent he hides me, in the inmost recess of his royal tent, safe from peril. On a rock fastness he lifts me high up; my head rises high above my enemies that encompass me. I will make an offering of triumphant music in this tabernacle of his, singing and praising the Lord..."

Palms of victory and stucco crowns fill the interior of Sant' Ivo alla Sapienza with triumphant iconographic music.

If the tent-tabernacle was the first of God's houses on earth, then the temple, built by David's son Solomon was the second. Its decoration, described in the book of Kings (III Kings 6-9), particularly of the Holy of Holies in which was placed the ark, consisted of cherubim and palm trees, plated with gold.

In Ezekielem Explanationes, the extremely influential work of Jesuits Jeronimo del Prado and Juan Bautista Villalpando published between 1596 and 1604[27], it is claimed that the temple seen in a vision by the prophet Ezekiel in the 6th century B.C. was the same as that built by Solomon 400 years earlier and destroyed by the Babylonians 25 years before the date of Ezekiel's prophesy. Villalpando reconstructed the Temple based on Ezekiel's description, (Ezekiel: 40-48) where measurements are given in cubits. Giving the Temple an image as real architecture was seen as a means of revealing its full mystical import.[28] This reconstruction also featured

decoration in the form of palm trees and cherubim. It comes as no surprise, then, to find palm branches and cherubim decorating the interior of Sant' Ivo, temple of Solomonic Wisdom and tabernacle of the bread and wine of the new convenant.

Villalpando reconstructed the temple of Ezekiel's prophesy as architecture dictated by God not only because he believed it to be the same as Solomon's temple, but also, much more importantly, because Ezekiel's temple prefigured Christ, the "temple not made by human hands", and Christs's church, ultimately glorified as the Heavenly Jerusalem of St. John's Apocalypse. No 17th-century catholic architect could have been unaware of Villalpando's work -- certainly not Borromini -- and I believe that he intended Sant' Ivo to have a mystical significance similar to that of Villalpando's celebrated reconstruction of Solomon's temple.

Borromini's church not only recalls Solomon's temple but also a temple even more ancient than Solomon's: the tent-tabernacle of Moses where God first lodged with humanity. Since God is both Alpha and Omega, one cannot invoke Alpha without invoking Omega. One would therefore expect to find, in addition to signs of God's first association with men, signs of his ultimate relationship with his creation. Such signs are present, and they originate, naturally enough, in St. John's vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem (the Glorified Church, the Last Temple), described in the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible.

On the front façade, above the entrance, as mentioned, is the Lamb of the Apocalypse, who is Christ, lying on the book of the seven seals. The interior is full of apocalyptic associations. The crowns thrown down by the elders before God's throne (Apocalypse 4.10) appear on the walls. The twelve stars which crown the Virgin in Apocalypse 12.2 crown the interior of the dome. The walls of the Heavenly City have twelve foundation stones on which are written the names of the twelve apostles. Sant' Ivo has twelve niches, designed to accommodate statues of those apostles. The heavenly city has no need of sun or moon -- "the glory of God shone there" (Apocalypse 21.23): within the lantern, the highest point inside the church
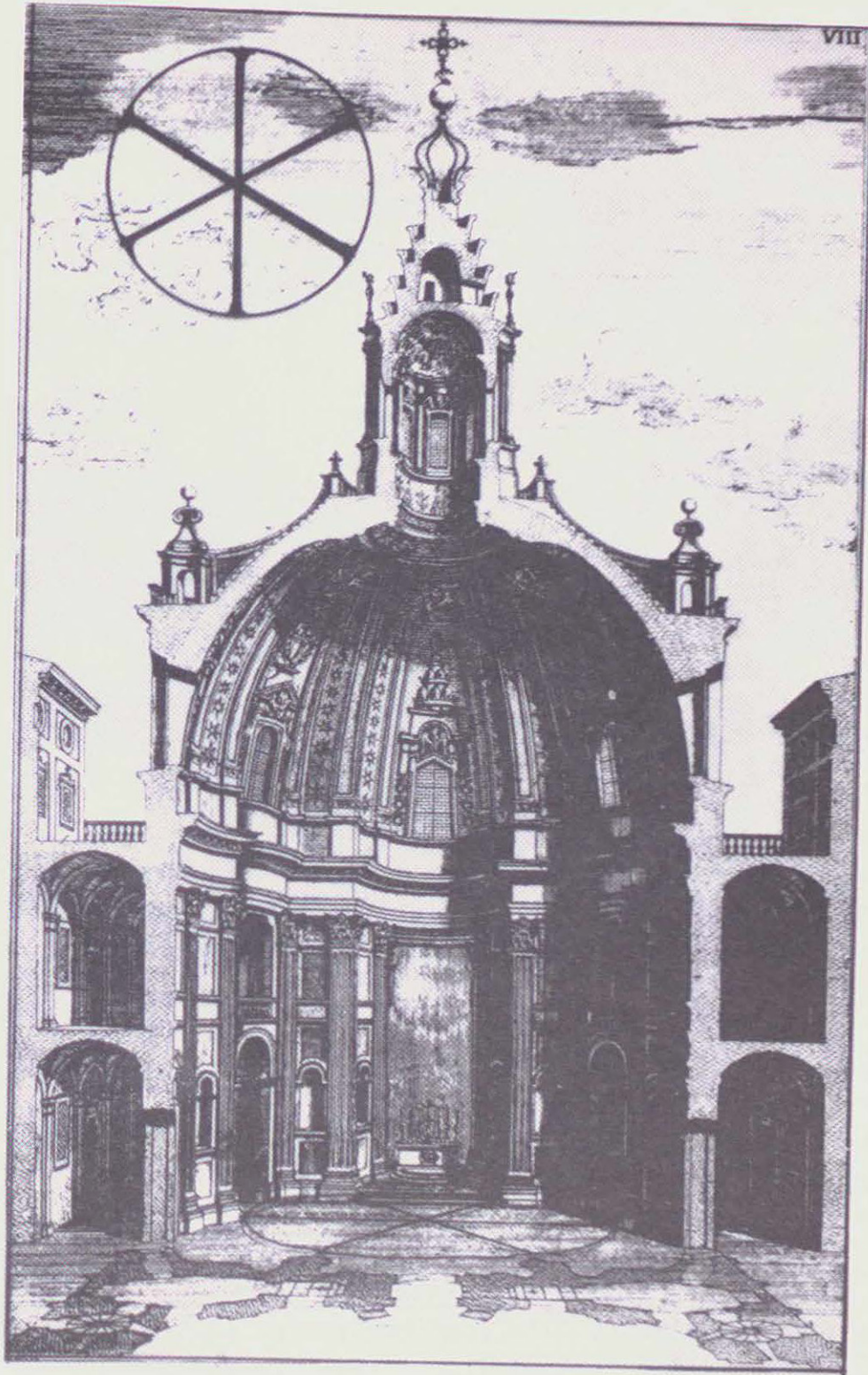
Fig. 6
Sectional perspective looking towards the altar,
plate VIII, Opera.

Fig. 7
The alchemist praying before his tent,
from de Mirimonde, Astrologie et Musique.

is crowned by a ring of flame, known iconographically as God's glory. The bride of the Lamb, Christ's church, wears linen of shining white. So does Sant' Ivo, whose white interior walls seem to hang in folds, like a tent -- or a bridal garment.

The concluding verses of St. John's revelation read, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel ... I, the offspring of David's race; I, the bright star that brings the day ...". The stars and crosses of the dome were discussed earlier. Now we see that their significance also links Borromini's church to the Glorified Church of St. John's vision, and in so doing, makes Sant' Ivo, like the Temple reconstructed by Villalpando, a mystical prophesy of that glorified church.

All the plans and elevations of the Opera show Sant' Ivo with a two columned portico (Fig. 8) which seems never to have been built. With Solomon in mind, it is difficult not to see the two columns of this entrance as recalling Jachin and Boaz, the two bronze pillars erected on either side of the entrance to Solomon's temple. The dedication to St. Ivo suggests another reason for evoking the Solomonic temple.

Enlightened dispensation of justice was the chief manifestation of Solomon's wisdom. We all remember how he established the parentage of an infant claimed by two different women by proposing to cut the baby in half (III Kings 3.16-28). In this connection, it is particularly fascinating to discover that Saint Ivo Helory (1253-1303), the Breton saint to whom the church is dedicated, was a lawyer, is the patron saint of lawyers as well as of the University of Nantes in Brittany, and is said to have "administered justice with an impartiality and kindness which gained him the good-will even of the losing side".[29]

The church portico illustrated in plate XVII of the Opera features two female figures reclining on its pediment. One is clearly the "Christian Faith" of Cesare Ripa's Iconologia[30], first published in 1593. Ripa describes the iconographical representation of Christian faith as a virgin dressed in white, holding in her right hand a cross and an open book, exactly as she appears on Borromini's pediment, where her presence needs no elucidation. The second figure is of less obvious significance. She appears as a woman with two

babies on her lap, looking at one, who suckles at her left breast, with a loving gaze, while completely disregarding the other, who stares up at her hungrily. It has as its source plate V of an emblem book by one Petrus Costalius, or Pierre Cousteau, published in 1555.[31]

Every correctly formulated emblem in the 16th century had a motto, an "ikon" or image, and an epigram.[32] The motto of Pierre Cousteau's emblem tells us, in effect, that justice is impartial, and that the emblem originates with the stoic philosopher, Crysippus. A woodcut illustrates a woman with two babies, nursing both, and the epigram under it explains that she represents the goddess Justice (Iustitia) whose right breast nourishes war, and whose left one, peace.

In Borromini's adaptation (Fig. 8), Iustitia feeds only peace while discord goes hungry; just as Justice fostered harmony through her agent Saint Ivo Helory when he settled opposing claims "with an impartiality and kindness which gained him the goodwill even of the losing side". In more general terms, the emblem of Justice, coupled as it is with that of Christian Faith, reminds the believer that Christian justice is ever tempered with love, and that impartial love is what makes Christ the "Prince of Peace".

A veritable 17th-century mania, whose moral purpose was to instruct while pleasing the eye,[33] the language of emblems is everywhere present in Sant' Ivo. We have already discussed the significance on many of them, including some perhaps less obviously "emblematic" in the strict 17th-century sense of the word. Belonging to the same family as emblems, and part of the 17th-century emblem mania were devices and coats of arms, whose use was ubiquitous, even to the decoration of clothing and of state apartments.[34]

The building of Sant' Ivo spanned the reign of three popes. The first was Urban VIII Barberini, and his device was the bee. Its shape and the shape of its honeycomb is reflected in the hexagonal ground plan of the church. That the hexagon reflected the Barberini device, as well as other intentions already discussed, is confirmed by plate X of the Opera. The second pope was Innocent X Pamphili, the only papal patron to

favour Borromini over Bernini. His coat of arms bears three lilies as well as a dove carrying an olive branch. The dove appears (plate XXVVIII, Opera), at the top of Borromini's corkscrew spire while lilies decorate the interior of the dome. The decoration of the church in the late 1650's was carried out during the reign of Alexander VII Chigi, whose coat of arms was quartered with oak trees and with a device of six "monti", or mounts, topped by an eight-pointed star. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Chigi monti and stars, and the branches and leaves of oak trees the predominant heraldic motif of Sant' Ivo. Critics seem to be unanimous in seeing the eight-pointed stars in Sant' Ivo exclusively as Chigi stars. These stars also symbolize Christ, the redeemer, the morning star of the Apocalypse. The fact that they are Chigi stars as well simply enriches their meaning.

The use of papal arms in the church of Sant' Ivo has another significance, much more profound than the flattery of actual or potential patrons. When a Christian professes his faith he is recalling a verifiable point in history when the eternal entered time; when, as C.S. Lewis puts it, "myth became fact ... without ceasing to be a myth".[35] That is why, when he recites the apostles' creed, the Christian says that Jesus Christ, son of God, "suffered under Pontius Pilate". The Christian myth of the Dying God differs from all the others in that it can be dated.[36]

The papal arms in Sant' Ivo serve a similar function to the mention of Pontius Pilate in the apostles' creed. Borromini's masterful manipulation of straight and curved lines, of triangles and circles, has succeeded in invoking Alpha and Omega, in making the eternal present. Transfixing the timeless in time are the emblems of bee, dove, and Chigi monti. The first and last temples of Judeo-Christian myth are also this particular temple built during the pontificates of Urban VIII Barberini, Innocent X Pamphili, and Alexander VII Chigi. Seen in this light, the whole church becomes a metaphor for the mystery of the Incarnation.

Incarnation, with a small "i", as the embodiment of truth in poetry, is a lesser mystery but similar in kind to that when, for the Christian, the Word became flesh nearly two thousand years ago. As the church of
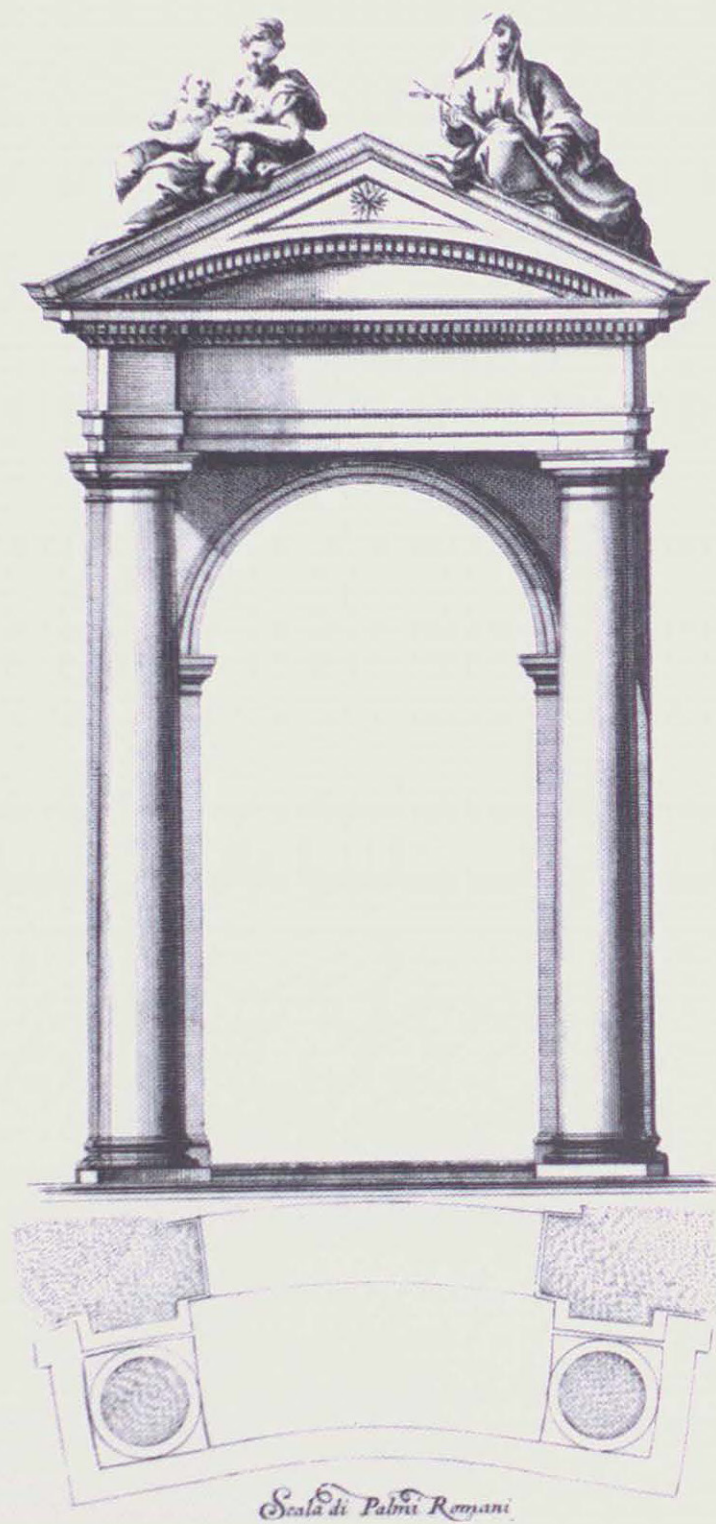
Scala di Palmi Romani

Fig. 8
Unbuilt entrance portico, plate XVII, <u>Opera</u>.

Sant' Ivo so eloquently demonstrates, architecture has the potential for making poetic truth not only materially present but actually inhabitable. It is a potential whose exploitation demands that architects acknowledge the existence of a world of truth worth making flesh. I believe that such assent is crucial if the architect who seeks meaning is to attain his goal.

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NOTES

1. Anthony Blunt, Borromini, (London, 1979).

2. San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane and the Oratory of San Filippo Neri.

3. Rudolf Wittkower, "Borromini: His Character and Life" in Studies in the Italian Baroque, (London, 1975), p. 155. Borromini is known to have been both celibate and abstemious.

4. Wittkower, op. cit.

5. Op. cit.

6. Paolo Portoghesi, "Borromini", in The Encyclopaedia of World Art, p. 555.

7. Wittkower, op. cit.

8. Op. cit.

9. Hermetism was a magico-astrological body of knowledge, based on a collection of writing known as the Hermetica, which anthologize the thinking of what turned out, in the 17th century, to be a spurious ancient Egyptian sage known as Hermes Trismegistus, or "thrice-great" Hermes. The practice of hermetism involved a wide range of magical activities and was often combined with Christian belief, which many saw as its having foreshadowed. Frances Yates' Girodano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, (London, 1964), is and excellent source book on the subject.

Yates, op. cit., p. 45 ff.

Sympathetic magic involved the practice of channelling divine influences, which pour down uninterruptedly from the heavens, by the use of talismans and images appropriate to the power involved.

10. Pierre de la Ruffieniere du Prey, "Solomonic Symbolism in Borromini's Church of S. Ivo alla Sapienza", Zeitschrift fur Kunst-Gesichte, Vol. XXXI, 1968, p. 216.

11. Blunt, op. cit., p. 114.

12. Yates, op. cit., p. 449. See note 8, above. The "reign of Hermes Trismegistus" lasted from the late 15th to the early 17th centuries.

13. Yates, op. cit.

14. Giordano Bruno, Opera Latine, I.iii, (Florence 1889), p. 19.

15. A.N. Didron, Christian Iconography, (London, 1851), p. 130 ff.

16. L. Duclaux, "Dessins de Martin van Heemskerck". Revue du Louvre, 1981, no. 5, p. 376 ff.

17. Blunt, op. cit., p. 126. Blunt asserts this transmutation as a paradox without mentioning its redemptive significance.

18. Didron, op. cit., p. 424.

19. Op. cit., p. 420.

20. Op. cit., p. 392.

21. Paolo Portoghesi, Borromini: Architettura come Linguaggio, (Rome, 1967).

22. Dodron, op. cit., p. 393.

23. Blunt, op. cit., pp. 121,122.

24.

25. Op. cit., p. 114.

26. See illustrations in Robert Jan van Pelt, "Philo of Alexandria and the Architecture of the Cosmos", A.A. Files 4, July 1983, pp. 3-15.

27. See Rene Taylor, "Hermetism and Mystical Architecture in the Society of Jesus", in Wittkower (ed.), Baroque Art, the Jesuit Contribution (New York, 1972).

28. Taylor, op. cit., p. 75.

29. Herbert Thurston, S.J., and Donald Attwater, Butler's Lives of the Saints (London, 1956), p. 351.

30. Cesare Ripa, Iconologie, French edition of 1644, figure LXIV.

31. Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schone, Emblemata, (Stuttgart, 1967), p. 1555.

None of the critical works consulted discusses the figures on the pediment. The

attribution of Couteau's emblem as the source for Borromini's is my own.

32. Wadislaw Tatarkiewicz, History of Aesthetics, (Paris, 1974) Vol. III. p. 223.

33. Mario Praz, Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery, (Rome, 1964), p. 169 ff.

34. Loc. cit.

35. C.S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact", in God in the Dock, (London, 1979), p. 43; first published in Undeceptions, (London, 1971).

36. Osiris and Dionysus are two examples of Gods whose death and resurrection cannot be dated. For a comparative study of the Dying God myth, see Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough.

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