

PART ONE
THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION AND
THE EARLY BAROQUE

CIRCA 1600—CIRCA 1625

CHAPTER I
ROME: SIXTUS V TO PAUL V
<1585—1621>

WITH the Sack of Rome in 1527 an optimistic, intellectually immensely alert epoch came to an end. For the next two generations the climate in Rome was austere, anti-humanist, anti-worldly, and even anti-artistic. The work of reform of the Church, begun at the Lateran Council in 1512 on Julius II's initiative, was seriously taken in hand and carried out with grim determination. During Pius IV's pontificate (1559–65) the Venetian envoy reported from Rome: 'Life at Court is mean, partly through poverty, but also owing to the good example of Cardinal Borromeo. ... They [the clergy] have altogether withdrawn from every sort of pleasures. ... This state of things has been the ruin of artisans and merchants. ...' But the practice of art was far from being extinct: it was turned into an important weapon to further Catholic orthodoxy.

The Council of Trent and the Arts

At its last session in December 1563 the Council of Trent, which had accomplished the work of reform over a period of almost twenty years, pertinently defined the role assigned to the arts in the reformed community. Religious imagery was admitted and welcomed as a support to religious teaching. One passage of the decree demands that 'by means of the stories of the mysteries of our Redemption portrayed by paintings or other representations, the people be instructed and confirmed in the habit of remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith'. Consequently strictest discipline and correctness in the rendering of the holy stories were required, and the clergy was made responsible for the surveillance of the artists. The terse deliberations of the Council were soon enlarged upon by a veritable flood of literature, produced by churchmen and reformers rather than by practising artists.

Leaving all details aside, the recommendations of such writers as St Charles Borromeo, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, the Fleming Molanus, Gilio da Fabriano, Raffaello Borghini, Romano Alberti, Gregorio Comanini, and Possevino may be summarized under three

headings: (i) clarity, simplicity, and intelligibility, (ii) realistic interpretation, and (iii) emotional stimulus to piety. The first of these points is self-explanatory. The second has a dual aspect. Many stories of Christ and the saints deal with martyrdom, brutality, and horror and, in contrast to Renaissance idealization, an unveiled display of truth was now deemed essential; even Christ must be shown 'afflicted, bleeding, spat upon, with his skin torn, wounded, deformed, pale and unsightly',¹ if the subject requires it. Truth, moreover, called for accuracy down to the minutest detail. On this level, the new realism almost becomes synonymous with the old Renaissance concept of decorum, which requires appropriateness of age, sex, type, expression, gesture, and dress to the character of the figure represented. The relevant literature abounds in precise directives. It is these 'correct' images that are meant to appeal to the emotions of the faithful and support or even transcend the spoken word.

And yet, in the decrees of the Council and in the expositions by its severe partisans, there is almost an iconoclastic streak. In no uncertain terms did the Council proscribe the worship of images: in the words of the decree 'the honour shown to them refers to the prototypes which those images represent'.² But it is easier to postulate the difference between idol and image than to control the reaction of the masses. We therefore find men like St Philip Neri warning his penitents not to fix their eyes too intently on images, and St John of the Cross advocating that the devout man needs few images and that churches, where the senses are least likely to be entertained, are most suitable for intense prayer.

It has long been a matter of discussion among art historians to what extent the art of the later sixteenth century expressed the exigencies of the reformed Catholic Church.³ In one respect the answer is not difficult to give; artists of religious imagery had to comply with some of the obvious demands of counter-reformatory decorum, such as the avoidance of nude figures. In another respect the answer is more baffling. The Church was vociferous in laying down the rules, but how to sublimate them into an artistic language of expressive power – that secret could be solved only by the artists. This granted, are we at all capable to judge whether, where, and when the artists caught up with the spirit of the Council? Since apodictic statements in an area pertaining to individual sensibility are doomed to failure, our conclusions have relative rather than absolute value. After this proviso, it may be said that, with the exception of the Venetians and a few great individualists like the aged Michelangelo, most of the artists working roughly between 1550 and 1590 practised a formalistic, anti-classical, and anti-naturalistic style, a style of stereotyped formulas, for which the Italians coined the word *maniera*⁴ and which we now call 'Mannerism' without attaching a derogatory meaning to the term. Virtuosity of execution and highly decorative surface qualities go with compositional decentralization and spatial and colouristic complexities; in addition, it is not uncommon that deliberate physical and psychic ambiguities puzzle the beholder. Finally, the intricacies of handling are often matched by the intricacies of content. Many pictures and fresco cycles of the period are obscure and esoteric, possibly not in spite of but because of the close collaboration between painter and priest. One is inclined to believe that this art, which not rarely reveals a hardly veiled licentiousness under the guise of prudery, was suited to please the refined Italian society, then following the dictates of

Spanish etiquette, but it had hardly the power to stir religious emotions in the mass of the faithful. To be sure, Mannerism as it was practised during the later sixteenth century was not an answer to the artistic requirements of the counter-reformatory Church: it lacked clarity, realism, and emotional intensity.

It is only from about 1580 onwards, or roughly twenty years after the promulgation of the Council decrees, that we begin to discern a counter-reformatory art on a broad basis. So much may be said at present: the new art has not a clear-cut unified physiognomy. Either the realistic or the emotional component may be stressed; as a rule, clarity supersedes complexity and often, though by no means always, deliberate formal austerity provides the answer to the severe 'iconoclastic' tendencies which we have mentioned. Meanwhile, however, the Counter-Reformation moved towards a new phase. Before discussing in some detail the pattern of artistic trends in Rome, certain aspects of the historical setting must be sketched.

The Church and the Reformers

The period from Sixtus V (1585-90) to Paul V (1605-21) has a number of features in common which single it out from the periods before and after. Spanish influence, which Italy had nurtured in all spheres of life during the sixteenth century, began to decline. Paul IV's war against Spain (1556-7), though a disastrous failure, was a first pointer to things to come. Sixtus V renewed the resistance against Spanish predominance. Clement VIII (1592-1605) reconciled Henry IV of France to the Holy See, and from then on dates the ascendancy of France at the expense of Spain. This change is symptomatic. The rigours of the reform movement were over. Never again was there a pope so austere, so ascetic and uncompromising as Paul IV (1555-9), so humble and saintly as Pius V (1566-72). From the 1570s and 80s on Protestantism was on the defensive; Catholic stabilization and restoration began and in the following decades all of Poland, Austria, southern Germany, France, and parts of Switzerland consolidated their Catholic position or even returned to the old Faith. The deep sense of danger which pervaded the Church during the critical years had passed, and with this returned an easier deportment and a determination to enjoy life such as had not existed in Rome since the days of the Renaissance. Moreover, progressive religious movements, born in the days of the Council of Trent but not always looked upon with approval by the reactionary faction of the reformers, were now firmly established. Protected and encouraged by papal authority, they developed into the most effective agencies of the Catholic Restoration.

The most important movements, St Philip Neri's Oratory and St Ignatius of Loyola's Society of Jesus, two seemingly opposed offshoots of neo-Catholicism, have yet much in common. Philip's Oratory grew out of informal meetings of laymen who preached and discoursed spontaneously, following only their inner voices. A cheerful but deeply devotional spirit prevailed among Philip's disciples, a spirit that reminded the learned Cardinal Baronius of early Christianity. It is clear that such an unorthodox approach to religion aroused awe and suspicion. But in 1575 Gregory XIII formally recognized the Oratory and in the same year its seat was transferred to the church of S. Maria in Vallicella.

After that the Oratory soon became fashionable, and a pope like Clement VIII was very close to it. Although the rules were written in 1583 and a definite constitution, solemnly approved by Paul V, was drawn up in 1612, the democratic spirit of the original foundation was preserved. Philip's apostolate, as Ludwig von Pastor says, extended down from the pope to the smallest urchin in the streets. The Congregation remained a group of secular priests tied together by voluntary obedience and charity. Philip died in May 1595. It is characteristic of the universal reverence in which he was held that the process of canonization began as early as two months after his death.⁵

By contrast to the Oratory, the Society of Jesus was monarchical and aristocratic in its constitution, pervaded by a spirit of military discipline, bound by strict vows, and militant in its missionary zeal. But, like the Oratory, the Society was designed to serve the common people; like the Oratorians, the Jesuits were freed from the bonds of monastic observance and replaced the traditional withdrawal behind the walls of the monastery by an active participation in the affairs of the world. Notwithstanding their determined opposition to the new scientific age that was dawning, their intellectualism, casuistry, and interest in education were as typical of the new spirit as their approach to the doctrine of Grace and the guide to devotion laid down by Ignatius himself in the *Spiritual Exercises*. The Dominicans were upholders of Thomism, which had seen such a powerful revival in the days of the Council of Trent, and championed the Pauline-Augustinian-Thomistic position, that Grace descended on man irrespective of human participation. The Jesuits, by contrast, taught that human collaboration was essential to render Grace efficacious. This point of view was advocated with great learning by the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina in his *Concord of Free Will with the Gifts of Grace*, published in 1588, and resulted in a long-drawn-out struggle with the Dominicans which ended only in 1607, by order of Paul V himself. Although the Holy See reserved judgement and sided neither with Thomism nor Molinism, the suspense alone was like a battle won by the Jesuits: the more positive and optimistic Jesuit teaching, that man has an influence on the shaping of his destiny, was admitted and broke the power of medieval determinism.

Although inspired by the ascetic writings of the past, St Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* were equally new and progressive. Their novelty was twofold. First, the method of guiding the exercitant through a four-weeks' course is eminently practical and adaptable to each individual case. During this time the periods of contemplation are relatively brief and hardly interfere with normal duties. The cleansing of the soul does not prepare for, or take place in, cloistered seclusion; it prepares, on the contrary, for the active work as a soldier of the Church Militant. And secondly, all a man's faculties are employed to make the Exercises an extremely vivid personal experience. The senses are brought into play with almost scientific precision and help to achieve an eminently realistic awareness of the subjects suggested for meditation. The first week of the exercises is devoted to the contemplation of Sin, and St Ignatius requires the exercitant to see the flames of Hell, to smell the sulphur and stench, to hear the shrieks of sufferers, to taste the bitterness of their tears and feel their remorse. During the last two weeks the soul lives with equal intensity through the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. The *Spiritual*

Exercises were written early in St Ignatius's career and, after many revisions, were approved by Paul III in 1548. Although large numbers of the clergy practised the Exercises at an early date, they became most effective in the course of the seventeenth century, after the publication in final form in 1599 of the Directory (*Directorium in Exercitiis*), drawn up by Ignatius as a guide to the Exercises.

The list of distinguished seventeenth-century artists who were Jesuits is longer than is generally realized.⁶ Even among the others there were probably not a few who felt drawn towards Jesuit teaching. Bernini's close relations with the Jesuits are well known, and it has been noticed that there is a connexion between the directness of Loyola's spiritual recommendations, their tangibility and realism, and the art of Bernini and his generation.⁷ At an earlier date the same observation can be made with regard to Caravaggio's art.⁸ But there is no common ground between the spirit of the Exercises and the broad current of Late Mannerism. Nor is it possible to talk of a 'Jesuit style',⁹ as has often been done, or to construe a direct influence of the Jesuits on stylistic developments at any time during the seventeenth century.

Ignatius's practical and psychological approach to the mysteries of faith, so different from the abstract theological speculations of the Council discussions, was shared not only by men like St Philip Neri and St Charles Borromeo, but even by such true sixteenth-century mystics as St Teresa and St John of the Cross. Unlike the mystics of the Middle Ages, they controlled, ever watchful, the stages leading to ecstasy and supplied in their writings detailed analyses of the soul's ascent to God. It characterizes these counter-reformatory mystics that they knew how to blend the *vita activa* and *contemplativa*. No more practical wisdom and down-to-earth energy can be imagined than that shown by Teresa and John of the Cross in reforming the Carmelite Order.

Similarly, determination, firmness, and tenacity in translating into action the decrees of the Council guided St Charles Borromeo, the youthful Archbishop of Milan who was Pius IV's nephew. At the time of his death in 1584 (aged forty-six), he had, one is tempted to say, streamlined his large diocese, had modernized clerical education by founding his famous seminaries, and had prepared manuals for pupils, teachers, and artists. Charles Borromeo was a staunch supporter of both the Oratory and the Society of Jesus. He practised the *Spiritual Exercises* and leant heavily on Jesuit support in carrying through his reforms at Milan. It was he who formed the most important link between the papal court and the new popular movements, and who promoted the ascendancy of Jesuits and Oratorians. Both Philip and Ignatius had to struggle for recognition. In spite of the latter's fabulous success, external vicissitudes under the Theatine Pope Paul IV, the Dominican Pope Pius V, and the Franciscan Pope Sixtus V ended only when Gregory XIV confirmed St Ignatius's original constitutions in 1591; but the internal difficulties were not resolved until Paul V's reign (1606).

Ignatius died as early as 1556; Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit missionary, the 'Apostle of the Indies', had died four years before; Teresa passed away in 1582, Charles Borromeo in 1584, and Philip Neri in 1595. The processes leading to their beatification and canonization were conducted during the first two decades of the new century. The

inquiry into St Charles's life began in 1604, and he was canonized in 1610. Ignatius was beatified in 1609 after a long process begun under Clement VIII. Teresa's process of beatification was concluded after ten years in 1614, Philip Neri's in 1615, and Francis Xavier's in 1619. After protracted discussions initiated under Paul V, the four great reformers, Ignatius, Teresa, Philip Neri, and Francis Xavier, were canonized during Gregory XV's brief pontificate, all on 22 May 1622.

This date, if any, is of symbolic significance. It marks the end of the 'period of transition' here under review. When these reformers joined the empyrean of saints, the struggles were past. It was a kind of authoritative acknowledgement that the regenerative forces inside Catholicism had saved the Church. This date may also be regarded as a watershed in matters of art. The period from Sixtus V to Paul V has none or little of the enthusiastic and extrovert qualities of the exuberant Baroque which came into its own in the 1620s and prevailed in Rome for about fifty years. Moreover, during the earlier period the old and the new often exist indiscriminately side by side. This is one of the important characteristics of these forty-odd years, and it must be said at once that the official art policy of the popes tended to support reactionary rather than progressive artists. The reverse is true from Urban VIII's reign onwards.

The 'Style Sixtus V' and its Transformation

Compared with the second and third quarters of the sixteenth century, its last decades saw an immense extension of artistic activity. The change came about during the brief pontificate of the energetic Sixtus V (1585-90). It is well known that he transformed Rome more radically than any single pope before him. The urban development which resulted from his initiative and drive reveals him as a man with a great vision. It has rightly been claimed that the creation of long straight avenues (e.g. 'Strada Felice', linking Piazza del Popolo with the Lateran), of star-shaped squares (Piazze S. Maria Maggiore and del Popolo, before Valadier), and the erection of fountains and obelisks as focusing points for long vistas anticipate seventeenth-century town-planning ideas. In the historic perspective it appears of decisive importance that after more than half a century a pope regarded it as his sacred duty – for the whole enterprise was undertaken 'in majorem Dei et Ecclesiae gloriam' – to turn Rome into the most modern, most attractive, and most beautiful city of Christianity. To be sure, this was a new spirit; it was the spirit of the Catholic Restoration. But the artists at his disposal were often less than mediocre, and few of the works produced in those years can lay claim to distinction. After the Sack of Rome a proper Roman school had ceased to exist, and most of the artists working for Sixtus were either foreigners or took their cue from developments outside Rome. In spite of all these handicaps something like a 'style Sixtus V' developed, remaining in vogue throughout the pontificate of Clement VIII and even to a certain extent during that of Paul V.

This style may be characterized as an academic *ultima maniera*, a manner which is not anti-Mannerist and revolutionary in the sense of the new art of Caravaggio and the Carracci, but tends towards dissolving Mannerist complexities without abandoning

Mannerist formalism. It is often blunt and pedestrian, on occasions even gaudy and vulgar, though not infrequently relieved by a note of refined classicism. This characterization applies equally to the three arts. It is patently obvious in architecture. Sixtus gave the rebuilding of Rome into the hands of his second-rate court architect, Domenico Fontana (1543-1607), although the much more dynamic Giacomo della Porta was available to him. Fontana's largest papal building, the Lateran Palace, is no more than a dry and monotonous recapitulation of the Palazzo Farnese, sapped of all strength. A similar academic petrification is evident in a façade like that of S. Girolamo degli Schiavoni which Sixtus commissioned from Martino Longhi the Elder (1588-9). Without altogether excluding Mannerist superimpositions of motifs, this architecture is flat, thin, and timid. It is against such a background that Carlo Maderno's revolutionary achievement in the façade of S. Susanna (1603; Plate 35) must be assessed. It is true that Clement VIII favoured Giacomo della Porta and that after the latter's death in 1602 Carlo Maderno stepped into his position as architect of St Peter's. But it is also true that the architect after Paul V's own heart was Flaminio Ponzio (1559/60-1613),¹⁰ who perpetuated until his death a noble version of the academic Mannerism of the 1580s and 90s. And it is equally true that the Cavaliere d'Arpino, whose feeble classicism is the exact counterpart in painting of Longhi's and Ponzio's buildings, was in almost unchallenged command during the 1590s¹¹ and maintained a position of authority throughout Paul V's pontificate.

The frescoes of the Vatican Library (which Domenico Fontana had built), the papal chapel erected by Fontana in S. Maria Maggiore, and the frescoes in the transept of S. Giovanni in Laterano exemplify well the prosaic nature and vulgarity of official taste under Sixtus V and Clement VIII. Although varying somewhat in style and quality, the painters engaged on such and other official tasks - Antonio Viviani, Andrea Lilio, Ventura Salimbeni, Paris Nogari, Giovan Battista Ricci, Giovanni Guerra, Arrigo Fiamingo (Hendrick van den Broeck), and Cesare Nebbia - fulfilled at least one requirement of the Council decrees, namely that of clarity. At the same time, mainly two Flemings, Egidio della Riviera (Gillis van den Vliete) and Nicolò Pippi of Arras (Mostaert), and the Lombard Valsoldo (Giovan Antonio Paracca), were responsible for the flabby statues and narrative reliefs in Sixtus V's multicoloured chapel. The two former died in the early years of the seventeenth century, while Valsoldo lived long enough to work again on the decoration of Paul V's chapel, the counterpart to that of Sixtus V. This 'pragmatic' style fulfilled its purpose and gratified the patrons, even when it sank down to the level of pure propaganda. The example that comes to mind is the many frightful scenes of martyrdoms in S. Stefano Rotondo, which invariably have a nauseating effect on the modern beholder. But Nicolò Circignani (called Pomarancio, 1516-96), who painted them, was the artist favoured by the Jesuits;¹² the church belonged to the German novices of the Order. It was just the unrelieved horror of these representations that was to inflame missionary zeal. In the words of Cardinal Paleotti: 'The Church wants, in this way, both to glorify the courage of the martyrs and to set on fire the souls of her sons.'¹³ Nor can it be denied that such paintings hardly evoke aesthetic satisfaction.

If a bird's-eye view of the whole period from Sixtus V to the end of Paul V's reign shows some intrinsic common qualities, a closer inquiry reveals the existence of a variety of trends. In addition, there is a slow but continuous shift even of official art policy away from Sixtus V's philistine counter-reformatory art towards a fuller, more vigorous, more poetical, and also more emotional manner.

Before the end of the century four principal tendencies may be differentiated in Rome itself, each having its roots far back and each having much wider, all-Italian implications. There was first the facile, decorative manner of the arch-Mannerist Federico Zuccari (1542/3-1609), who combined in his art elements from the latest Raphael and from Tuscan and Flemish Mannerism with impressions which had come to him from Veronese and the Venetians. He was the truly international artist of the *fin de siècle*, constantly travelling from court to court, Olympian in demeanour, prone to esoteric intellectual speculations, superficial and quick in his production. Although he had no official commissions in Rome after 1589 and was indeed absent from the city most of the time after that year, his influence was yet great on the painters working for Sixtus V and Clement VIII.

A second trend was that of the Florentines, who had a considerable share in mid-sixteenth-century fresco-painting in Rome. Their complex Mannerism, tied to the old Florentine emphasis on rhythmic design, followed the general development and gave way towards the end of the century to a more simplified and solid academic manner, which is mainly represented by Bernardino Poccetti. Artists such as Passignano and Ciampelli transplanted this Florentine manner to Rome, not without blending it with Venetian colourism and Zuccari's *maniera facile*. For the third trend, there was Girolamo Muziano, who came into prominence under Sixtus V's predecessor, Gregory XIII. Coming from Brescia and steeped in the traditions of Venetian painting, he never fell wholly for the *maniera* then in vogue. It was really he who introduced into Rome a sense for Venetian colour and a taste for rich landscape settings. This was taken up and developed by Flemings, mainly Paul Brill (1554-1626), whose 'picturesque' northern *vedute* were admitted even in churches and on the walls of the Vatican Palace in the reign of Paul V.¹⁴ A good deal of Muziano's chromatic approach to painting was assimilated in Rome. Artists like his pupil Cesare Nebbia (c. 1536-1614), one of the busiest and most slapdash practitioners of the period, showed how to reconcile it with Federico Zuccari's academic Mannerism. Finally, Federico Barocci's Correggienesque emotionalism must be mentioned, although he was working in Urbino. His pictures reached Rome at an early date, but his influence spread even more through the many artists who came under his spell.

Taken all in all, during the first decades of the new century the tendency of older painters of all shades was to supplant Zuccaresque and late Tuscan Mannerism by a softer and warmer palette and a more sensitive characterization of figures. Caravaggio's and Annibale Carracci's revolts broke into this setting at the end of the nineties. But it must be emphasized that there was no immediate repercussion on papal art policy. Nor did the art of these masters appreciably influence the development of the older artists, although a painter like Cristoforo Roncalli (1552-1626) used a Carraccesque 'cloak' for

his pictures at the end of his career¹⁵ and Giovanni Baglione turned Caravaggesque for brief moments. Moreover while Annibale's Bolognese followers entrenched themselves firmly in Rome during the first two decades of the seventeenth century and public taste shifted decisively in their favour away from the older Mannerists, Caravaggism remained almost entirely an affair for eccentrics, connoisseurs, and artists and had run its course – as far as Rome was concerned – by the time Paul V died.

Paul V and Cardinal Scipione Borghese as Patrons

A brief survey of patronage during Paul V's reign will help the reader to assess the complexities which beset the historian who tries to define the art of the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Official patronage in Rome was concerned with three major tasks, St Peter's, the Cappella Paolina in S. Maria Maggiore, and the Quirinal Palace. By far the greatest problem facing Paul V was the completion of St Peter's. Once he had taken the decision to abandon Michelangelo's centralized plan, the pope proceeded with great determination. Carlo Maderno began the façade in 1607 and the nave in 1609 and finished them both in 1612 (with the exception of the farthest bay at each end; Plate 1). Shortly after (1615–16) he built the Confessio, which opens in the form of a horse-shoe before the high altar under the dome. Although the pope himself supported Maderno's appointment in spite of strong competition from less progressive architects, the decoration of the new building went into the hands of steadfast Mannerists.

Paul V, it is true, was not responsible for the decoration of the dome, consisting of trite representations in mosaic of Christ and the Apostles, half-figures of popes and saints, and angels with the Instruments of the Passion. This commission, for obvious reasons unrivalled in importance and by far the largest available at the turn of the century, was handed over by Clement VIII to his favourite Cesare d'Arpino in 1603. Owing to its magnitude, it was not finished until 1612.¹⁶ Clement VIII also chose most of the artists for the huge altarpieces, later transferred into mosaic. Roncalli, Vanni, Passignano, Nebbia, Castello, Baglione, and Cigoli were here given splendid opportunities, while neither Caravaggio nor Annibale had a chance of being considered.

Paul V's principal sculptor in St Peter's was the Milanese Ambrogio Bonvicino (c. 1552–1622),¹⁷ the friend of Federico Zuccari and Cristoforo Roncalli. His is the classicizing relief of *Christ handing the Keys to St Peter* over the central entrance to the church. Giovan Battista Ricci from Novara (1545–1620), one of the least solid *maniera* painters under Sixtus V, was given the honourable task of painting frescoes in the Confessio, and he also designed the stucco decorations of the portico. Since elegant and rich stucco decorations were the only field in which Roman Mannerists under Gregory XIII and Sixtus V had shown real inventiveness and originality, Ricci here drew upon a vigorous, living tradition and created a work the excellence of which has always been acclaimed. Finally, it should be mentioned that Ferrabosco's famous clock-tower of 1616–17,¹⁸ which had to be pulled down when Bernini built his colonnades, was not an impressive

example of architectural grandeur. During the time it was standing, it must have clashed strangely with the early Baroque vigour of Maderno's façade.

The Cappella Paolina in S. Maria Maggiore (Plate 2), which the pope resolved to build as early as June 1605, supplies a more coherent idea of official taste than the vast complex of St Peter's. Almost the size of a church, the Greek-cross chapel with its high dome rose to the design of Flaminio Ponzio, who had to follow closely the model of the Chapel of Sixtus V. These two chapels, forming a kind of transept to the Early Christian basilica, are testimonies of the beginning and the end of an epoch. Ponzio's structure was completed in 1611, but the decoration was not finished until the end of 1616. Coloured marbles, gilding, and precious stones combine to give an impression of dazzling splendour which surpasses the harsher colour effects of Sixtus's Chapel. It was Sixtus V who with his multicoloured chapel began a fashion which remained in vogue far into the eighteenth century. One should be careful not to explain this custom simply as the 'baroque' love for swagger and magnificence. Much of the coloured marble was taken from ancient buildings. This was an important part of Sixtus V's counter-reformatory programme of systematically transforming pagan into Christian Rome. Moreover, by placing this sumptuous spectacle before the eyes of the faithful, Sixtus fulfilled the neo-medieval demand, voiced by men like Molanus, that the Church, the image of heaven on earth, ought to be decorated with the most precious treasures in existence. Along the side walls of the Paolina rise the enormous tombs of Clement VIII and Paul V with the statues of the popes surrounded by painterly narrative reliefs – all set in a triumphal-arch-architecture which is so massive and rich that it dwarfs the relatively small-scale sculptural decoration (Plate 4A). Compared with their models in the Chapel of Sixtus V, these tombs show a further accretion of decorative detail, to the detriment of the effectiveness of the sculpture. The artists responsible for the statues and reliefs belonged mainly to the older generation born about 1560: Silla da Viggìù, Bonvicino, Valsoldo, Cristoforo Stati, Nicolò Cordier, Ippolito Buzio, Camillo Mariani, and Pietro Bernini, Gianlorenzo's father. In addition, two younger artists, Stefano Maderno and Francesco Mochi, were employed.¹⁹ In other words, practically every sculptor then working in Rome made some contribution. It is indicative of the change taking place that Italians should supersede the Flemings who were so prominent in Sixtus's Chapel. The Lombard element now prevailed. In spite of the uniformity of the sculptural decoration, style and quality differ; and it is probably not by chance that the most reactionary and timid among the sculptors, Silla da Viggìù, received the lion's share: to him fell the statues of Clement VIII and Paul V.

Sculpture at this moment lagged behind the revolutionary events in painting brought about by Caravaggio and Annibale Carracci. It is not astonishing that the schism between the old guard and progressive masters like Mariani and Mochi – obvious *post festum* to art-historically trained eyes – was hardly noticed in the pope's circle. But the situation in painting was vastly different, and here the compromise character of Paul V's policy cannot be overlooked. Characteristically, he gave the direction of the whole enterprise into the hands of the Cavaliere d'Arpino. The Cavaliere himself painted the pendentives of the dome (Plate 4B) and the lunette above the altar; the Florentine

Ludovico Cigoli decorated the dome, and Guido Reni, possibly on the initiative of the Cavaliere, executed ten smaller frescoes in all, among them the unsatisfactorily shaped lunettes flanking the windows (1610-12). In addition, the Florentine Passignano (frescoes in the sacristy),²⁰ and the Mannerists Giovanni Baglione and Baldassare Croce (1553-1628) were given a share, while Lanfranco joined them later.²¹ It is typical of one facet of official patronage during the second decade that all these artists, Mannerists, 'transitionalists', and 'modernists', worked side by side, and that the academic eclecticist d'Arpino topped the list.

A study of the third great papal undertaking, the Quirinal Palace, allows one to revise to a certain extent the impression carried away from the Paolina. Late in 1605 the pope entrusted his court architect, Flaminio Ponzio, with the enlargement of the existing building, which Carlo Maderno was ordered to continue after the former's death in 1613.²² A number of splendid new rooms were ready for decoration from 1610 onwards, two of which deserve special attention: the 'Sala Regia' (now 'Sala de' Corazzieri') and the pope's private chapel (Cappella dell'Annunciata). The decorative framework of the painted frieze along the walls of the Sala de' Corazzieri (1616-17)²³ was apparently designed by Agostino Tassi (c. 1580-1644). Its crowded organization on the short walls reveals Tassi's late Mannerist Florentine training, while the perspective openings into imaginary rooms on the long walls show him influenced by the North Italian illusionism that had had a home in Rome since the days of Gregory XIII. Lanfranco and Carlo Saraceni were the principal executants of the figures and scenes.²⁴ The division of hands between the artists participating is not easily established,²⁵ but the phenomenon is interesting enough: we are faced with an *entente cordiale* of a Carracci pupil and a Caravaggio follower under the direction of a Roman who had studied in Florence. It may be added that it was rare for a *Caravaggista* to be considered for public fresco commissions of this kind.²⁶ Tassi himself consolidated here his reputation as a specialist in illusionist architecture (*quadratura*); in this capacity he collaborated with Domenichino and later, above all, with Guercino.

The main glory of the palace is the Cappella dell'Annunciata, which was decorated between 1609 and 1613²⁷ by Guido Reni assisted by Lanfranco, Francesco Albani, Antonio Carracci, and the less distinguished Tommaso Campana. Here at last we have a fully fledged co-ordinated enterprise by the young Bolognese masters. It found enthusiastic approval at the papal court; one can, however, hardly doubt that the pope's preference for Guido Reni in the Quirinal as well as in S. Maria Maggiore and the Vatican²⁸ was due to Cardinal Scipione Borghese's good offices.

The cardinal nephew, Paul V's favourite, was perhaps the most brilliant representative of the Pauline era. Jovial, vivacious, worldly in his outlook, famed for his sumptuous banquets, he invested much of his immense wealth in his buildings, collections, and the patronage of living artists. He was a true enthusiast and, contrary to the admonitions of the Trent Council, loved art for art's sake. His rapacity was matched by a catholicity of taste which also seems to have been a hallmark of other aristocratic patrons of these years. Not only a vast number of ancient works, but also many of the finest jewels of

the present Borghese Gallery, paintings by Titian, Raphael, Veronese, Dossi, and others, adorned his collection; but it is more interesting in this context that he bought with equal zest pictures by the Cavaliere d'Arpino, by Passignano, Cigoli, Barocci, Caravaggio, Domenichino, and Lanfranco.²⁹ In fact, he was one of the earliest admirers of Caravaggio, just as he discovered at a remarkably early period the genius of Bernini. In his munificent commissions of works in fresco, both for private and public buildings, he showed partiality to the Bolognese, particularly to Guido Reni, who belonged to his household from 1608 onwards, and later to Lanfranco. But he did not hesitate to employ even feeble Mannerists, men like Nicolò Pomarancio (St Andrew Chapel, S. Gregorio Magno) or the latter's pupil, Gaspare Celio (Caffarelli Chapel, S. Maria sopra Minerva).

After Ponzio's death, the architect Scipione Borghese favoured for ecclesiastical buildings sponsored and paid by him was Giovan Battista Soria (1581-1651), who continued an academic manner far into the seventeenth century. His façade of S. Maria della Vittoria (1625-7); his masterpiece, the façade and forecourt of S. Gregorio Magno (begun 1629; Plate 5B); and the nave of the cathedral at Monte Compatri near Rome (1630), were all executed for Scipione Borghese. Though not without dignity, they testify to the latter's conservative views as far as church architecture is concerned. Soria's architecture is somewhat more forceful than Ponzio's, who, on the cardinal's initiative, had executed the delicate classicist renovation of S. Sebastiano fuori le mura (1609-13, completed by Vasanzio;³⁰ Plates 3 and 5A). During his lifetime Ponzio remained the family architect and in this capacity continued the palace at which the elder Martino Longhi had worked for Cardinal Deza and which Paul V had purchased shortly before he was raised to the pontificate (February 1605). Irregular in shape, the western façade, the longest palace front in Rome, is largely the work of Ponzio. It follows the sombre tradition of the Palazzo Farnese, while the festive double-column courtyard (a novelty in Rome) points to the import of north Italian, probably Genoese, ideas.³¹ The Palazzo Borghese was reserved by Paul V for the use of his brothers. In addition, Cardinal Scipione built for himself the present Palazzo Rospigliosi-Pallavicini in Piazza Montecavallo, begun in 1613. As in S. Sebastiano, the Dutchman Vasanzio (Jan van Santen), trained as a cabinet-maker and later Ponzio's collaborator and successor as papal architect, took over after his master's death.³² It was Vasanzio who built the attractive Casino (1612-13), which Antonio Tempesta, Paul Brill, Cherubino Alberti, Passignano, Giovanni Baglione,³³ and, above all, Guido Reni decorated with frescoes. Agostino Tassi and Orazio Gentileschi painted the ceiling of the nearby 'Casino of the Muses' (1611-12) and Ludovico Cigoli a cycle of frescoes in yet another casino.³⁴ Thus this *ensemble*, created for Scipione Borghese, supplies once again a fascinating cross-section through the variety of tendencies existing side by side at the beginning of the second decade.

The cardinal's enthusiasm was concentrated on the erection of his villa on the Pincio (the present Galleria Borghese), which he wanted to be built by Ponzio.³⁵ But once again death interfered, and Vasanzio served as architect of the structure which rose between 1613 and 1615. If any building, it was this villa in its original condition that

represented the quintessence of its patron's taste. The type follows that of the Roman *villa suburbana*, established a hundred years before in Peruzzi's Farnesina. But where Peruzzi used a classical severity, Vasanzio covered the whole U-shaped front with niches, recesses, classical statuary, and reliefs (Plate 6B; much of the decoration was stripped at the beginning of the nineteenth century) – a late example of that Mannerist *horror vacui* which had found its 'classical' expression in Pirro Ligorio's Casino of Pius IV and Annibale de' Lippi's Villa Medici on the Pincio. Vasanzio also enlarged Martino Longhi's Villa Mondragone at Frascati (1614–21)³⁶ for Scipione Borghese, and it is here, in the fountains and the beautiful loggia, so often erroneously attributed to Vignola, that his picturesque approach to architecture found a new and unexpected outlet.

Although far from exhaustive, our list of works executed for Paul V and his illustrious nephew is remarkable enough. But the impression of their lasting achievement as patrons of the arts would be incomplete without mentioning the many fountains with which they embellished Rome. Fountains rose in the squares of S. Maria Maggiore and the Lateran, in Piazza Scossa Cavalli and Piazza di Castello (destroyed). None of them can compete with the stateliness and elegance of Maderno's mushroom-shaped fountain in the Square of St Peter's or the monumentality of Ponzio's triumphal-arch front of the Acqua Paola (on the Janiculum) with its cascades of gushing water (1610–14; Plate 6A).³⁷ Ever since Sixtus V's days fountains had played an important part in Rome's urban development, but in contrast to the tradition of Florentine fountains with their predominantly sculptural decoration, Roman fountains were either unadorned, consisting of a shaft which supported a combination of basins, or, if placed against a wall, were architectural and monumental. It is again a sign of the essential unity of the period from Sixtus V to Paul V that the approach to this problem remained basically unchanged. Ponzio's Acqua Paola was merely an improved version of Domenico and Giovanni Fontana's Acqua Felice (1587). As in so many other respects, the change came only during Urban VIII's pontificate when Bernini broke irrevocably with this Roman tradition (Plate 53A).

Caravaggio's and Annibale Carracci's Supporters

The most distinguished patron in Rome after Scipione Borghese was surely the Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564–1637). As a young man he gave Caravaggio his unstinted support, and his courageous purchase of the *St Matthew*, refused by the priests of S. Luigi de' Francesi, probably prevented the shipwreck of Caravaggio's career as a painter of monumental religious pictures. But the Marchese collected with equal relish works of the Bolognese³⁸ and, moreover, reserved a special place in his household for the Mannerist Cristoforo Roncalli (called Pomarancio, 1552–1626), who began as a pupil of the older Nicolò Pomarancio and developed into a highly esteemed 'transitionalist'. It was this painter who served as Giustiniani's counsellor in artistic matters and who accompanied him in 1606 on his travels through Italy and Europe.³⁹ Later in Giustiniani's life the German Sandrart published for him his collection of ancient marbles (*Galleria Giustiniani*, 1631) to which Frenchmen, Duquesnoy and other Flemings as

well as Lanfranco and Domenichino's pupil Giovan Battista Ruggieri contributed the designs and engravings.

If Caravaggio found devoted patrons among the nobility and higher clergy, it would yet be incorrect to talk of a distinct faction in his favour. The men who sided with him seem to have been enterprising, enthusiastic, and liberal in their outlook. This is certainly true not only of Scipione Borghese and Vincenzo Giustiniani, but also of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, Caravaggio's earliest patron, who has been described as 'a kind of ecclesiastical minister of the arts in Rome';⁴⁰ it is true of the brothers Asdrubale and Ciriaco Mattei, who had 'fallen victim to the fashion for Caravaggio' (Baglione), but at the same time patronized artists like Cristoforo Roncalli and Gaspare Celio. These last artists were also favoured by the Crescenzi brothers, who were responsible for Caravaggio's getting the commission for the Contarelli Chapel; and this list might easily be continued.

Quite different were the fortunes of Annibale Carracci and his Bolognese friends and followers. Indeed, it is permissible in their case to talk of a faction, or rather two factions, determined to promote the Bolognese cause. There were the Farnese, in particular the powerful Cardinal Odoardo, under whose aegis Annibale painted the Farnese Gallery; he remained unfailingly loyal to his Bolognese *protégés*, employed Domenichino and Lanfranco in the palace, and must be credited with having collected most of the sixty-odd works attributed in the Farnese inventory of 1662 to the Carracci and their school. The second faction was associated with the circle of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, Clement VIII's nephew and secretary of state, for a time the most influential man in Rome, and the political antagonist of Odoardo Farnese. The cardinal himself cherished the art of the Cavaliere d'Arpino. But his secretary, Monsignor Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570-1632), born at Bologna, was Annibale's devoted admirer and Domenichino's close friend; to the same circle belonged Monsignor Giovanni Antonio Massani and Francesco Angeloni, Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini's secretary.⁴¹ Both Massani and Angeloni concentrated on collecting the Bolognese masters, and we happen to know that Angeloni possessed at least 600 Annibale drawings for the Farnese Gallery. It is at once evident that the men of this coterie, unlike Caravaggio's unbiased patrons, were guided by principles. Their single-minded partisanship was to become of ever greater importance in the early years of the seventeenth century.

Agucchi himself tried his hand at a theoretical treatise, his *Trattato della Pittura*,⁴² in which, among other ideas, he formulated anew the central principle of the classical doctrine, that nature is imperfect and that the artist has to improve upon her by selecting only her most beautiful parts. This empirical, Aristotelian theory was harnessed for an attack on two fronts: belief in it justified stricture of the *maniera* painters as much as of the *Caravaggisti*. From this point of view neither the Platonic concept of an *a priori* idea of beauty in the artist's mind (Zuccari's *disegno interno*) nor the exact imitation of imperfect nature (Caravaggio) was a defensible position. It is interesting that this new affirmation of the classical doctrine was written between 1607 and 1615, just after Zuccari's *Idea* had appeared (1607), which in a happy phrase has been called 'the swan song of the subjective mysticism of Mannerist theory'.⁴³ Agucchi and his circle found the

realization of their theoretical approach – namely nature embellished and idealized – in the art of Annibale Carracci and Domenichino. They despised the older Mannerists and created the legend of Caravaggio's unbridled naturalism.

More than one distinguished scholar has pointed out that the period around 1600 was averse to theoretical speculations.⁴⁴ The essential truth of this cannot be contested. The artists themselves became tongue-tied. Federico Zuccari's elaborate programme of lectures to be delivered before the newly founded Academy of St Luke was an anachronism even before it ingloriously petered out as a result of the artists' resistance. Both Caravaggio and Annibale Carracci derided the clever chattering about art of which the Mannerists were so fond. The liberal-minded patrons seem to have been interested in experiment and quality rather than in principles. Moreover, no important treatise extolling the new ideas was published during the first half of the seventeenth century. And yet the flame kindled in Agucchi's circle was never again extinguished. On the contrary, the classical-idealist theory, which guaranteed the dignity of painting on a level with Zuccari's academic eminence, was soon more or less vociferously championed, strengthened, and streamlined by amateurs and artists alike. It may be recalled that Domenichino sided, as one would expect, with the extreme classical point of view by exalting *disegno* (line) at the expense of *colore* (colour), and that later Francesco Albani planned a treatise the orthodoxy of which, judging from Malvasia's report, would have gone far beyond Agucchi's rather broad-minded expositions.⁴⁵ In any case, the *cognoscenti* of the early seventeenth century sided more and more determinedly with the opinions of the Agucchi circle and helped to bring about the climate in which the ascendancy of Bolognese classicism over Mannerism and Caravaggism was secured.

This ascendancy may be gauged by a glance at the list (p. 47) of important fresco cycles in palaces and churches executed by the Bolognese from 1608 onwards. Especially as regards the decoration of palaces, they enjoyed almost a monopoly during the second decade.

The new Churches and the new Iconography

No appreciation of the vast changes that came about in the artistic life of Rome from Sixtus V's days onwards is possible without due consideration of the hectic activity in the ecclesiastical field. Few churches had been built in Rome during the first half of the sixteenth century. But as the century advanced the new intensity of devotion in the masses required energetic measures, and, above all, the new Orders needed churches to accommodate their large congregations. The beginning was made with the Gesù, the mother church of the Jesuit Order, rising from 1568 and consecrated in 1584. With its broad single nave, short transept, and impressive dome this church was ideally suited for preaching from the pulpit to great numbers of people. It established the type of the large congregational church that was followed a hundred times during the seventeenth century with only minor variations. During the next decades Rome saw three more large churches of this type rising, each surpassing the previous one in size. In 1575 the Chiesa Nuova (S. Maria in Vallicella; Figure 15) was begun for St Philip Neri's Oratorians by

Matteo di Città di Castello and continued by the elder Martino Longhi.⁴⁶ The building was consecrated in 1599, but Fausto Rughesi's traditional façade was not yet finished in 1605. S. Andrea della Valle, a stone's throw from the Chiesa Nuova, was designed by Giacomo della Porta (not by Pietro Paolo Olivieri) for the Theatines, whose Order had been founded during the early years of the religious strife (1524).⁴⁷ Begun in 1591, the building was taken over by Carlo Maderno in 1608 and completed in 1623 except for the façade. Finally, a second vast Jesuit church, S. Ignazio, was planned after the founder's canonization and begun in 1626. The canonization of St Charles Borromeo in 1610 was immediately followed by the dedication to him of no less than three churches in Rome: the very large S. Carlo al Corso, S. Carlo ai Catinari, built for the Barnabites, a congregation founded at Milan in 1533, and the small S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, which the Discalced Trinitarians later replaced by Borromini's structure.

In addition to these new buildings, owed to the counter-reformatory Orders and the new saints, more medium-sized and small churches were erected during the three decades of Clement VIII's and Paul V's pontificates than in the preceding 150 years. One need only call to mind S. Maria della Scala (in Trastevere, 1592), S. Nicolò da Tolentino (1599-1614), S. Giuseppe a Capo le Case (1598, rebuilt 1628), S. Bernardo alle Terme (1598-1600), and S. Susanna (façade, begun 1597), all built during Clement VIII's reign, or S. Maria della Vittoria (1606), S. Andrea delle Fratte (1612), SS. Trinità de' Pellegrini (1614), S. Maria del Suffragio (1616), and S. Maria Liberatrice (1617), all rebuilt or newly raised under Paul V. To this list may be added such important restorations as Cardinal Baronius's of SS. Nereo and Achilleo,⁴⁸ Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini's of S. Niccolò in Carcere, and Cardinal Sfondrate's of S. Cecilia in the days of Clement VIII as well as those of S. Francesca Romana, S. Crisogono, S. Sebastiano fuori le Mura, SS. Quattro Coronati, and S. Maria in Trastevere during Paul's pontificate. Finally, large and richly decorated chapels like that of Cardinal Caetani in S. Pudenziana (1595), of the Aldobrandini in S. Maria sopra Minerva (1600-5), of Cardinal Santori in the Lateran (begun before 1602), and of the Barberini in S. Andrea della Valle (1604-16) show that the first families of Rome competed in adding lustre to old and new churches.

In spite of solid and worthy achievement, the masters of the period here under review on the whole lack initiative, inventiveness, and a spirit of adventure. It seems to have been *bon ton* in those years not seriously to infringe established patterns. Thus a cloud of anonymity, if not of dullness, hangs over much ecclesiastical work of the time. One wonders how a Bernini, a Cortona, or a Borromini would have solved the problem of the large congregational church if such an opportunity had been offered them. In any case, the great masters of the post-Pauline era found stirring, imaginative, and highly personal solutions for traditional ecclesiastical tasks. The change effected during Urban VIII's pontificate is no less revolutionary in this than in other respects.

All the immense work of construction going on in the last decades of the old century and the first of the new required decoration by painters, sculptors, stucco workers, and craftsmen. As a rule, the direction remained in the hands of the architect. In the case of the Aldobrandini Chapel in S. Maria sopra Minerva (begun 1600, consecrated 1611),

Giacomo della Porta and, after his death, Carlo Maderno filled this post. But they were no more than the *primi inter pares* in co-ordinating the works of the painters Barocci (*Last Supper*, altar) and Cherubino Alberti (vault) and of the sculptors Camillo Mariani, Nicolò Cordier, Ippolito Buzio, Valsoldo, and Stefano Maderno. Collective enterprises became the rule from Sixtus V to the end of Paul V's pontificate, even though the artists engaged on the same task often held very different views. This trend was reversed under Urban VIII. Chapels such as those of the Raimondi and Cornaro families show throughout the imprint of Bernini's master-mind: co-workers were assistants rather than artists in their own right.

The new churches confronted painters in particular with a prodigious task. They had not only to cover enormous wall-spaces with frescoes but had, above all, to create a new iconographical tradition. Saints like St Charles Borromeo, St Ignatius, St Francis Xavier, and St Teresa had to be honoured; their lives, miracles, and worldly and spiritual missions had to be solemnized. In addition, in the face of the Protestant challenge, the dogmas of the Catholic Church had to be reasserted in paintings which would strengthen the belief of the faithful and grip their emotions. Finally, as regards many scenes from the Old and New Testaments and from the lives of the saints, a shift was needed away from tradition towards an emphasis on heroic exemplars (David and Goliath, Judith and Holofernes), on models of repentance (St Peter, the Prodigal Son), on the glory of martyrdom⁴⁹ and saintly visions and ecstasies, or on hitherto unexplored intimate events from the childhood of Christ. These remarks indicate that one can truly talk about a counter-reformatory iconography.⁵⁰

The rise of the new iconography may be observed from the last two or three decades of the sixteenth century onwards, but it must be stressed that in Rome the vast majority of the great cycles of frescoes, in the Gesù, S. Andrea della Valle, S. Carlo al Corso, the Chiesa Nuova, S. Ignazio, S. Carlo ai Catinari, and elsewhere were painted after the first quarter of the seventeenth century. In other words, the decoration of these churches belongs to a stylistic phase later than the buildings themselves. The reason lies, partly in any case, in the time-lag between the early activities of the new Orders and the canonization of their founders. But this is not the whole story. It was, for instance, in keeping with the early austere 'iconoclastic' tendencies that St Philip Neri wanted the walls of the Chiesa Nuova whitewashed,⁵¹ the same walls which half a century later were covered with Pietro da Cortona's exuberant decorations. Moreover, although it is true that one can hardly expect representations of the apotheoses of saints before they are canonized, the climate under Clement VIII and Paul V was not favourable to the 'deification' in pictures of the great men of the Counter-Reformation. As we have mentioned, the popes themselves ordered the most meticulous inquiries into the cases of the prospective saints and the processes dragged on over many years. It is also important to notice that, as a rule, there is a considerable difference in the representation of the saints between the earlier phase and the later. In pictures of the second decade, such as those by Orazio Borgianni (S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome; Plate 18B), Orazio Gentileschi (S. Benedetti, Fabriano), or Carlo Saraceni (S. Lorenzo in Lucina, Rome), the saints may be shown in a state of devotion and ecstasy, and in this exalted frame of mind they may

see visions to which the beholder becomes a party. But rarely do they appear soaring up to heaven or resting on clouds in the company of angels, presupposing, as it were, that the entire image is the beholder's visionary experience (Plate 126).

Such scenes belong to the High Baroque, and for size and grandeur alone they establish a new artistic convention. When this happened, the great reformers had been dead for at least two generations, and it is evident even without any further comment that nothing could have been more averse to the spirit in which they had worked.

No doubt is possible, then, that the Counter-Reformation made necessary a specific counter-reformatory iconography; nor that the iconographical pattern of the early seventeenth century changed to a certain extent during the post-Pauline period. But can one also talk of a specific counter-reformatory style? Summarizing what has been indicated in the foregoing pages, we may conclude that, of course, the Church made use of various artistic manifestations and stylistic trends which in turn were not independent of the religious temper of the age. In the coexistence of 'classical' reticence and 'vulgar' pomp one may be able to discern two different facets of counter-reformatory art. But above and beyond all this, it seems possible to associate a distinct style with the spirit of the reformers: a style which reveals something of their urgency and enthusiasm, of their directness of appeal and mystic depth of conviction. Since this is a matter concerning all Italy, a more explicit verdict must be postponed until the development of painting in the provinces has been surveyed (p. 68).

The Evolution of the 'Genres'

It is often said that a significant step in the slow and persistent shift from the primarily religious art of the Middle Ages to the primarily secular art of modern times was accomplished during the seventeenth century. There is truth as well as fallacy in this statement. It is fallacious to believe that an equation exists between the degree of naturalism and realism – in themselves highly problematical notions – and the profane character of works of art. Verisimilitude is no synonym for irreverence. Although the logic of this statement is unassailable, whether or not the beholder will regard the art of the seventeenth century as a truly religious art depends on his own, partly subconscious, terms of reference. But it cannot be denied that the largest part of artistic production during the period under review is of a religious nature. By comparison the profane sector remains relatively insignificant. This is correct, even though after Annibale Carracci's Farnese ceiling classical mythology and history become increasingly important in the decoration of palaces. In this respect Paul V's reign reveals an undeniable affinity with the days of the Roman High Renaissance.

These observations may now be given more substance. It was in the years around 1600 that a long prepared, clear-cut separation between ecclesiastical and secular art became an established fact. Events in Rome hastened this division for the whole of Italy. Still life, genre scenes, and self-contained landscapes begin to evolve as species in their own right at this historical moment. None of these remarkable developments takes place without the active participation of northern, mainly Flemish, artists.⁵² Rome, of

course, was not the only Italian city where northern influence made itself felt. It may suffice to recall Florence, Bologna, and Genoa. Yet many northern artists were magically drawn to Rome, and Rome became the international meeting place where new ideas were avidly exchanged and given their characteristically Italian imprint.

The new species aroused such interest that even a man of Cardinal Federico Borromeo's stern principles was much attracted by such 'trifles' as landscapes and still lifes. We are choosing him as an example because his case illustrates that around 1600 a collector had to turn to Rome for specimens of the new genres. It is well known that the cardinal owned Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* (now Ambrosiana, Milan); he admired, moreover, the art of Paul Brill and Jan Bruegel, both of whom he befriended and whose works figured prominently in his collection at Milan. Whenever he stayed in Rome he visited Brill's studio,⁵³ and on one occasion at least, in 1611, Giovan Battista Crescenzi acted as intermediary between artist and patron. The correspondence reveals that Crescenzi, the supervisor of Paul V's official artistic enterprises and thus a great power in matters of taste, had an eye for the qualities of Brill's seascapes.

Paul Brill, the younger brother of the less important Mattheus, held a key position in the process of assimilating Flemish landscape painting in Italy.⁵⁴ His early Flemish manner changed considerably, first under Muziano's and later under Annibale Carracci's influence. Thus monumentalized and italianized, his landscapes and seascapes became part of the broad stream of the Italian development. They lead on to Agostino Tassi's seascapes⁵⁵ and finally to those of Claude.

It is true that landscape painting had emerged as a specialized branch during the second half of the sixteenth century. Italians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries admitted the 'genre' as legitimate, probably not uninfluenced by the prominence Pliny gave to the work of the Roman landscape painter Studius.⁵⁶ But from Alberti's days on the noble art of history painting had pride of place in the hierarchy of values, and Italians, for the time being at any rate, regarded landscape painting as a pleasant recreation from the more serious business of 'high art'. This was precisely how an artist like Annibale Carracci felt. Exclusive specialization in the lower genres was therefore left to the foreigners. These remarks, of course, apply also to still life and the popular genre.

In spite of their theoretical approach, the contribution of Italians to the development of the genres in the early years of the seventeenth century was not negligible. The popular genre had a home in Bologna and was cultivated by the Carracci rather than by Caravaggio. Although working with essentially Mannerist formulas, the pupil of the Fleming Stradanus, Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630), who spent most of his working life in Rome, became instrumental in creating the realistic battle-piece and hunting-scene. In Caravaggio's circle the detailed realism of the Flemish fruit and flower still life was to a certain extent stylized and replaced by a hitherto unknown fullness of vision.⁵⁷ But during the period with which we are at present concerned all this was still in its beginnings.⁵⁸

Only after the first quarter of the seventeenth century do we find that Italians are devoting themselves wholly to the practice of the specialized genres, that the market for

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these adjuncts to high art grows by leaps and bounds, and that each speciality is further subdivided into distinct categories. Foreigners again had a vital share in this process. The most patent case is that of landscape painting: the names of Poussin and Claude are forever associated with the full flowering of the heroic and pastoral landscape. But it was left to the Italian Salvator Rosa to establish the landscape type which the eighteenth century called 'sublime'.

CHAPTER 2
CARAVAGGIO

CARAVAGGIO, in contrast to Annibale Carracci, is usually considered a great revolutionary. From the mid seventeenth century onwards it has indeed become customary to look upon these two masters as being in opposite camps: the one a restorer of time-honoured tradition, the other its destroyer and boldest antagonist. There is certainly some truth in these characterizations, but we know now that they are much too sweeping. Caravaggio was less of an anti-traditionalist and Annibale Carracci more of a revolutionary than was believed for almost 300 years.¹

Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio, was born on 28 September 1573 in the small town of Caravaggio, south of Bergamo. Before the age of eleven he was apprenticed in Milan to the mediocre painter Simone Peterzano and stayed with him for about four years. Peterzano called himself a pupil of Titian, a relationship not easily revealed by the evidence of his Late Mannerist work.² One has no reason to doubt that in this studio Caravaggio received the 'correct' training of a Mannerist painter. Equipped with the current knowledge of his profession, he reached Rome about 1590 and certainly not later than 1592.³ His life there was far from uneventful. Perhaps the first consistent bohemian, he was in permanent revolt against authority, and his wild and anarchic character brought him into more than one conflict with the police.⁴ In 1606 he had to flee from Rome because of a charge of manslaughter. During the next four restless years he spent some time at Naples, Malta, Syracuse, and Messina. On his way back to Rome he died of malaria in July 1610, not yet thirty-seven years old.

When he first reached Rome, he had had to earn his living in a variety of ways. But back-work for other painters, among whom was perhaps the slightly older Antiveduto Gramatica (1571-1626),⁵ left a youth of his temperament and genius thoroughly dissatisfied. For a short time he also worked for Giuseppe Cesari (later the Cavaliere d'Arpino) as a studio hand,⁶ but soon started on his own. At first unsuccessful, his fortunes began to change when Cardinal Francesco del Monte bought some of his pictures.⁷ It seems that through the agency of this same prince of the Church he was given, in 1599, his first commission for a monumental work, the paintings in the Contarelli Chapel of S. Luigi de' Francesi (Plate 8 and frontispiece). This event appears in retrospect as the most important caesura in Caravaggio's career. From then on he produced almost exclusively religious paintings in the grand manner. With these data at hand, the brief span of Caravaggio's activity may conveniently be divided into four different phases: first, the Milanese period; even though paintings of this period will probably never be discovered, it is of great consequence not only because of the conventional training with Peterzano, but also because of the lasting impressions made on him by older North Italian masters such as Savoldo, Moretto, Lotto, and the brothers Giulio and Antonio Campi; secondly, the first Roman years, about 1590-9, during which Caravaggio

painted his *juvenilia*, for the most part fairly small pictures consisting, as a rule, of one or two half-figures (Plate 7A); thirdly, the period of monumental commissions for Roman churches, beginning in 1599 and ending with his flight from Rome in 1606;⁸ and finally, the work of the last four years, again mainly for churches and done in a fury of creative activity, while he moved from place to place.

A comparison between an early Roman and a post-Roman work (Plates 7A and 11) gives the measure of Caravaggio's surprising development. His uninhibited genius advanced with terrific strides into uncharted territory. If we had only his earliest and his latest pictures, it would be almost absurd to maintain that they are by the same hand. To a certain extent, of course, this is true of the work of every great master; but in Caravaggio's case the entire development was telescoped into about eighteen years. In fact, between the paintings shown on Plates 7A and 11 there may not be more than thirteen years.

Not unexpectedly, the biographical caesuras coincide with the vital changes in his style, but these changes have too many ramifications to be described by a purely formal analysis. Much more may be learned about them by inquiring into his approach to mythological, genre, and religious subjects and by focusing on the character and meaning of his realism and his *tenebroso*, the two pillars on which his fame rests. Contrary to what is often believed, genre scenes play a very subordinate part in Caravaggio's production. They seem even more marginal than mythological and allegorical⁹ themes and, may it be noted, almost all the non-religious pictures belong in the first Roman years. In contrast to genre painting, mythologies and allegories clearly indicate an artist's acceptance of a learned tradition; and it cannot be sufficiently emphasized that we find the young Caravaggio working within this tradition, of his own accord. It is fair to assume that in the Uffizi *Bacchus* (Plate 7A) he represented himself in mythological disguise.¹⁰

Mythological or allegorical portraiture has, of course, a pedigree leading back to Roman times. Nor is the attitude of the sitter here new in the history of portraiture. On the contrary, examples are legion showing the sitter addressing the beholder, as it were, from behind a table or parapet. What, then, is remarkable about this picture? Wine and wreath apart, there is little that is reminiscent of the god of antiquity. His gaze is drowsy, his mouth soft and fleshy; white, overfed, and languid, he holds the fragile glass with a dainty gesture. This well-groomed, pampered, lazy androgyne, static like the superb still life on the table, will never move or ever disarrange its elaborate coiffure and its precious pose. Contemporaries may have looked upon this interpretation as mythological heresy,¹¹ which was not Caravaggio's invention either. It originated in the era of Mannerism when artists began to play so lightly with mythological themes that the ancient gods could even become objects of derision.¹² But the Bacchic paraphernalia of Caravaggio's picture should not be regarded as mere supercilious masquerade: he chose the emblems of Bacchus to express his own sybaritic mood. When Bronzino represented Andrea Doria as Neptune, he conveyed metaphorically something about the admiral's mastery of the sea. Caravaggio's disguise, by contrast, makes sense only as an appropriate support to an emotional self-revelation. The shift from the statement of an objective message to

the indication of a subjective mood adumbrates a new departure the importance of which hardly needs stressing.¹³

The sitter's dissipated mood is also clearly expressed by the key in which the picture is painted: bright and transparent local colours with hardly any shadows are set off against the shining white of the mass of drapery. The colouristic brilliance is combined with an extraordinary precision and clarity of design and a scrupulous rendering of detail, particularly in the vine leaves of the wreath and the still life of fruit on the table.¹⁴ No atmosphere surrounds the figure; colour and light do not create space and depth as they do in Venetian painting. Depth, in so far as it can be visualized, is suggested by foreshortenings such as those of the arm and hand holding the wine-glass. Other early pictures by Caravaggio may be similarly described, but in none of them are the tones so glassy, the whites so penetrating, and the pink of the flesh so obscene. Colours and tone values clearly sustain the precious mood of the picture. At this period Caravaggio's method of stressing individual forms with local colour is as far removed from the practice of Venetian colourism as it is indeed from the elegant and insipid generalizations of the Mannerists. On the other hand, a marked Mannerist residue is perceptible in the Bacchus, not only in such details as the folds and the flaccid bare arm, but, above all, in the pervading quality of stylization, which proves that the old catchword of Caravaggio's realism should be used with caution, particularly in front of the early Roman works. Soon after the Bacchus, Caravaggio again represented himself in a mythological disguise, but this time appropriately expressing his own frenzy through the horrifying face of *Medusa* (Florence, Uffizi). The simple fact that he painted the picture on a round wooden shield proves his awareness of traditional literary associations, and those who quote this work as an extreme example of his realism unpermissibly divorce the content from the form. Nor is the formal treatment really close to nature, as anyone who tries to imitate the pose will easily discover. This image of terror has the power to 'petrify' the beholder just because it is unrealistic and reverts to the old expressive formula of classical masks of tragedy.¹⁵

Similarly, Caravaggio's few genre pieces can hardly be called realistic. Like other Italian artists of the period, he was indebted to Northerners who had long practised this branch of art and had begun to invade the Italian market in the later sixteenth century. But if their genre painting, true to the meaning of the word, shows anonymous people following their everyday occupations, it must be said that neither Caravaggio's *Card-Sharpers* nor his *Fortune-Teller* reflect fresh observations of popular contemporary life. Such slick and overdressed people were not to be found walking about; and the spaceless settings convey a feeling of the *tableau vivant* rather than of 'snapshots' of actual life.¹⁶ One looks at these pictures as one reads a romantic narrative the special attraction of which consists in its air of unreality.

It has been mentioned before that from 1599 onwards by far the greater part of Caravaggio's activity was devoted to religious painting, and henceforth very considerable changes in his approach to his art are noticeable. These changes may here be observed in a cabinet picture, the National Gallery *Supper at Emmaus* (c. 1600; Plate 9).¹⁷ Only the rich still life on the table links the picture to his early Roman period. But, as if his youthful

escapades were forgotten and eradicated, suddenly and unexpectedly Caravaggio reveals himself as a great painter of religious imagery. The change is marked not only by a revision of his palette, which now turns dark, but also by a regression to Renaissance exemplars. Compositionally the work derives from such representations of the subject as Titian's *Supper at Emmaus* in the Louvre, painted about 1545. In contrast, however, to the solemn stillness in Titian's work, the scene is here enacted by means of violent gestures – intense physical reactions to a spiritual event. Christ is deeply absorbed and communicates the mystery through the slight bending of His head and His downcast eyes, both accompanied by the powerful language of the blessing hands. The sacramental gesture of these hands takes on an added emotional significance through their juxtaposition to the lifeless legs of the chicken on the table. The incomprehension of the inn-keeper is contrasted with the reaction of the disciples who recognize Christ and express their participation in the sacred action by rugged, almost compulsive movements. In keeping with the tradition stemming from Alberti and Leonardo, Caravaggio, at this stage of his development, regarded striking gestures as necessary to express the actions of the mind.

With Caravaggio the great gesture had another distinct meaning; it was a psychological device, not unknown in the history of art,¹⁸ to draw the beholder into the orbit of the picture and to increase the emotional and dramatic impact of the event represented: for Christ's extremely foreshortened arm as well as the outflung arm of the older disciple seem to break through the picture plane and to reach into the space in which we stand. The same purpose is served by the precarious position of the fruit-basket which may at any moment land at our feet. In his middle period Caravaggio often used similar methods in order to increase the participation of the worshipper in the mystery rendered in the picture. Special reference may be made to the first version of the *St Matthew and the Angel* painted for the Contarelli Chapel, where the saint's leg appears to jut right out of the picture, or to the second version with one leg of the stool dangling over the ledge into the beholder's space; and also to the extremely foreshortened body of the saint in the *Conversion of St Paul* in S. Maria del Popolo (Plate 10) and the jutting corner of the Stone of Unction in the Vatican *Deposition*, which is echoed by Joseph of Arimathea's elbow.¹⁹

Towards the end of his Roman period Caravaggio painted a second *Supper at Emmaus* (Milan, Brera). Here he dispensed with the still life accessories on the table and, even more significantly, with the great gestures. The picture is rendered in a much less dramatic key and the silence which pervades it foreshadows a trend in his post-Roman work.

In the works of the middle period Caravaggio takes great pains to emphasize the volume and corporeal solidity of the figures, and sometimes packs them so tightly within the limits imposed by the canvas that they seem almost to burst the frame (Plate 10). In other paintings of this period, however, a tendency is stressed that was already noticeable in a few of the early pictures, namely the creation of a large spaceless area above the figures, an emptiness which Caravaggio exploited with tremendous psychological effect. Not only is the physical presence of the figures more vigorously felt by contrast with the unrelieved continuum, but the latter may even assume symbolic

significance as in the *Calling of St Matthew*, where darkness lies menacingly over the table around which St Matthew and his companions sit. In the majority of the post-Roman pictures the relation of figures to space changes in one direction, the most telling examples being the Syracuse *Burial of St Lucy* and the Messina *Raising of Lazarus* (Plate 11).²⁰ Here the deeply disturbing and oppressive quality of the void is rendered more acute by the devaluation of the individual figures. Following Italian tradition, during the middle period each single figure was sharply individualized; in the late pictures, by contrast, figures tend at first glance to merge into an almost amorphous mass. As one would expect, traditional gestures are abandoned and emotions are expressed by a simple folding of the hands, by a head held pressed between the palms or bowed in silence and sorrow. When ample gestures are used, as in the *Raising of Lazarus*, they are not borrowed from the stock of traditional rhetoric, as were the upraised hands of the Mary in the *Deposition* or the extended arms of St Paul in the *Conversion* (Plate 10). The spread-out arms of Lazarus at the moment of awakening have no parallel in Italian painting.

In his early pictures, Caravaggio often created an atmosphere of peculiar still life permanency. During the middle period he preferred a transitory moment, stressing the dramatic climax of an event, as in the first *Supper at Emmaus*, the *Judith killing Holofernes* (Rome, Casa Coppi), and the *Conversion of St Paul*. In the late period, the drama is often transposed into a sphere of ghost-like unreality. Although in a picture like the Naples *Flogellation of Christ* no real action is shown and the hangmen do not strike, as was the rule in the iconographical tradition, the scene is more cruel and infinitely more gripping and Christ's suffering even more poignant than in any previous rendering of the subject in Italy.

Many of Caravaggio's pictures of the middle period are tied to tradition not only in their language of expressive gesture and in their iconography,²¹ but even in their compositional arrangement. In this respect, perhaps none of his monumental works is more indebted to the past than the *Martyrdom of St Matthew* (Plate 8 and frontispiece). In this work he used to a considerable extent the Mannerist repertory of repoussoir figures together with compositional devices and refinements which were becoming rare at this moment in Rome.²² The type of composition with the figures revolving, as it were, round a central pivot is dependent on works like Tintoretto's *St Mark rescuing a Slave*, while the group of the executioner, saint, and frightened acolyte is borrowed from Titian's *Death of St Peter Martyr* (destroyed). It is not unlikely that the present composition, painted over an entirely different earlier one, was a concession forced upon Caravaggio by the difficulties which he encountered during the work in the Contarelli Chapel. This explanation is also suggested by the unique occurrence in his *œuvre* of an angel appearing from heaven upon clouds. Clouds were the traditional emblem to be used for the representation of visions and miracles: Caravaggio never admitted them, with this one exception. Whenever he had to show angels, he robbed them of those soft props which by no stretch of the imagination can support a figure of flesh and blood in the air.

Most of the later Roman works are much more severely constructed than the *Martyr-*

dom of *St Matthew*, witness the *Deposition of Christ* or the *Death of the Virgin*. But the post-Roman paintings are by comparison even more austere, and their compositions are reduced to a seemingly artless simplicity. Reference may be made to the solid triangle of figures in the Messina *Adoration of the Shepherds*, the closely packed group of figures in the *Lazarus*, or the hieratic symmetry of the coactors in the *Decapitation of St John*.

Looking at his early work in particular, one may be inclined, as generations have been, to regard Caravaggio as an artist who renders what he sees with meticulous care, capturing all the idiosyncrasies of his models. Caravaggio himself seems to have spread this legend, but we have already seen how little it corresponds to the facts. Moreover, apart from his recognizably autograph style, he developed what can only be called his own repertory of idiomatic formulas for attitudes and poses, the recurrent use of which was surely independent of any life model.²³ In addition, he sacrificed by degrees the interest in a logical disposition and rational co-ordination of the figures in favour of the emotional impact he wished to convey. This tendency is already noticeable in the early *Musical Party*, and is much more in evidence in the works after 1600. In one of the most striking pictures of this period, the *Conversion of St Paul*, it is impossible to say where the saint's lower right leg would be or how the attendant's legs can possibly be joined to his body. Later, in the post-Roman works, he was on occasions quite reckless, and nowhere more so than in the *Seven Works of Mercy*, one of his most moving and powerful pictures. The meaning of this procedure becomes patently clear in the *Burial of St Lucy*. By enormously exaggerating the size of the grave-diggers, sinister and obnoxious creatures placed painfully close to the beholder, and by representing them out of all proportion to the scale of the mourners only a few steps further back, the brutality and senselessness of the crime are more convincingly exposed than could ever have been done by a 'correct' distribution of figures in space.

All these observations lead one to conclude that Caravaggio progressively abandoned working from life models and that his post-Roman pictures, above all, were to a large extent painted from memory. This is also supported by the fact that no drawings by Caravaggio survive. He must, of course, have drawn a good deal in Peterzano's studio, but he seems to have reversed Mannerist procedure once he was on his own. Compared with the Renaissance masters, late Mannerists neglected studies from nature; they used stock poses for their preparatory designs and cartoons. It may be surmised that Caravaggio, by contrast, made many incidental sketches from nature, which one would not expect to survive, but dispensed with any form of cumbersome preparation for his paintings. In fact it is well known that he worked *alla prima*, straight on to the canvas, and this is the reason why his pictures abound in *pentimenti*, which can often be discovered with the naked eye. This procedure, admirably suited to his mercurial temperament, makes for directness and immediacy of contact between the beholder and the picture, whereas distance and reserve are the obvious concomitants of the 'classical' method²⁴ of arriving at the finished work by slow stages.

Caravaggio's *ad hoc* technique stemmed from a Venetian tradition, but in Venice, where preparatory drawings were never entirely excluded, this 'impressionist' approach

to the canvas had two consequences which seem natural: it led to a painterly softening of form and to an emphasis on the individual brush-stroke. In Caravaggio's work, however, the forms always remain solid, his paint is thin, and consequently the brush-stroke is hardly perceptible. In his middle period it begins to be more noticeable, particularly in the highlights, while in his post-Roman pictures two new conflicting tendencies are apparent. On the one hand, forms harden and stiffen, and bodies and heads may be painted with little detail and few transitions between light and dark - resulting in near-abstractions. Certain passages in the *Seven Works of Mercy* illustrate this trend very fully. Side by side with this development can be found what is, by comparison, an extremely loose technique: the face of Lazarus, for example, is rendered by a few bold brush-strokes only. Instead of the careful definition of form still prevalent during the middle period, or the daring simplification and petrification of form in certain post-Roman works, one is faced in the *Raising of Lazarus* with shorthand patterns symbolizing heads, arms, and hands.

Little has so far been said about the most conspicuous and at the same time the most revolutionary element of Caravaggio's art, his *tenebroso*. With his first monumental commissions he changed from the light and clear early Roman style to a new manner²⁵ which seemed particularly suitable to religious imagery, the main concern during the rest of his life. Figures are now cast in semi-darkness, but strong light falls on them, models them, and gives them a robust three-dimensional quality. At first one may be inclined to agree with the traditional view that his lighting is powerfully realistic; it seems to come from a definable source, and it has even been suggested that he experimented with a *camera obscura*. Further analysis, however, shows that his light is in fact less realistic than Titian's or Tintoretto's. In Titian's as later in Rembrandt's pictures light and darkness are of the same substance; darkness only needs light to become tangible; light can penetrate darkness and make twilight space a vivid experience. The Impressionists discovered that light creates atmosphere, but theirs is a light without darkness and therefore without magic. With Caravaggio light isolates; it creates neither space nor atmosphere. Darkness in his pictures is something negative; darkness is where light is not, and it is for this reason that light strikes upon his figures and objects as upon solid, impenetrable forms and does not dissolve them, as happens in the work of Titian, Tintoretto, or Rembrandt.

The setting of Caravaggio's pictures is usually outside the realm of daily life. His figures occupy a narrow foreground close to the beholder. Their attitudes and movements, their sudden foreshortenings into an undefined void, heighten the beholder's suspense by giving a tense sensation of impenetrable space. But despite, or because of, its irrationality, his light has power to reveal and to conceal. It creates significant patterns. The study of a picture like the *Doria St John the Baptist* of about 1600,²⁶ which derives from the nudes of the Sistine ceiling, will clarify this point. The pattern created by light and darkness almost gainsays the natural articulation of the body. Light passages radiate from a darker centre like the spokes of a wheel. Thus by superimposing a stylized play of light and shade over the natural forms, an extraneous concept is introduced which contradicts Michelangelo's organic interpretation of the human body. Caravaggio used

wheel-patterns of light in some of the multi-figured compositions of his later Roman years, for instance the *Martyrdom of St Matthew*, the *Crucifixion of St Peter*, and the *Death of the Virgin*. A glance at the illustration of the *Martyrdom* (Plate 8) suffices to see that the abstract pattern of light is given precedence in the organization of the canvas. It is the radiating light that firmly 'anchors' the composition in the picture plane and, at the same time, singles out the principal parts of dramatic import. In pictures of the middle period the areas of light are relatively large and coherent and coincide with the centre of interest. In the late pictures darkness engulfs the figures; flashes and flickers of light play over the surface, heightening the mysterious quality of the event depicted. This is nowhere more striking than in the *Raising of Lazarus*, where heads, pieces of drapery, and extremities break through the surrounding darkness - a real-unreal scene over which broods an ineffable sense of mystery.

From the very beginning of Christian imagery light has been charged with symbolism. God's presence in the Old Testament or Christ's in the New is associated with light, and so is Divine Revelation throughout the Middle Ages, whether one turns to Dante, Abbot Suger, or St Bonaventura. Although from the fifteenth century onwards light is rendered naturalistically and even atmospherically, particularly in Venice, it never loses its supernatural connotation, and the Baroque age did not break with this tradition. Nevertheless, painters of religious imagery were always faced with the seemingly insoluble problem of translating visions into pictorial language. Describing St Francis's stigmatization, St Bonaventura says 'when the vision had disappeared, it left a wonderful glow in his [St Francis's] heart'. Giotto was quite incapable of translating the essence of these words into pictorial language. He and many after him had to express the human experience of mystical union with God by a descriptive, narrative method. Language was far in advance of the visual arts. Seventeenth-century painters caught up with it. A painter like Cigoli was well able to render St Francis's psycho-physical reactions (Plate 28A). But although he made true in his painting the sensation described by Bonaventura, he was still tied to the traditional descriptive method: for the vision itself is shown bathed in heavenly light breaking through the clouds. It must be remembered that the ecstasy of vision is a state of mind to which no outsider is admitted; it is perception and revelation inside one man's soul. This was the way Caravaggio interpreted visions from the very beginning. In his *Ecstasy of St Francis* of about 1595²⁷ he showed the saint in a carefully observed state of trance; one eye is closed; the other, half open, stares into nothingness and the body, uncomfortably bent backward, seems tense and stiff. Mystery is suggested by the glimmer of light breaking through the dark evening sky. The invisible is not made visible, but we are allowed to wonder and to share; a wide scope is left for the imagination. It is the light alone that reveals the mystery, not light streaming down from the sky or radiating from the figure of Christ. The mature Caravaggio drew the last consequences. In his *Conversion of St Paul* he rendered vision solely on the level of inner illumination. Light, without heavenly assistance, has the power to strike Saul down and transform him into Paul, in accordance with the words of the Bible: 'Then suddenly there shone round about him a light from Heaven and he fell to the earth and heard a voice say unto him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' Paul

eyes closed, mouth open, lies completely absorbed in the event, the importance of which is mirrored in the moving expression of the enormous horse.

By excluding a heavenly source, Caravaggio sanctified light and gave it a new symbolic connotation. One may return to the study of his symbolic use of light in the *Calling of St Matthew*, where Christ stands in semi-darkness and the wall above him shines bright, while a beam of light falls on those who, still under the large shadow of darkness, are about to be converted. It is precisely the antithesis between the extreme palpability of his figures, their closeness to the beholder, their uncomeliness and even vulgarity—in a word, between the 'realistic' figures and the unapproachable magic light that creates the strange tension which will not be found in the work of Caravaggio's followers.

It has been shown in the first chapter that Caravaggio had devoted patrons among the liberally minded Roman aristocracy. And yet, his large religious pictures were criticized or refused with almost clockwork regularity.²⁸ The case of the *Death of the Virgin* throws an interesting light on the controversy which his works aroused and the fervour of the partisanship. It was rejected by the monks of S. Maria della Scala, the church of the Discalced Carmelites; but Rubens, at that time in Rome, enthusiastically advised his patron the Duke of Mantua to acquire the painting for his collection. Before it left Rome, however, the artists enforced a public exhibition and great crowds flocked to see the work. Caravaggio's opponents, it seems, were mainly recruited from the lower clergy and the mass of the people. They were disturbed by theological improprieties and offended by what appeared an irreverent treatment of the holy stories and a lack of decorum. They were shocked to find their attention pinpointed by such realistic and prominent details as the dirty feet in the first *St Matthew* and the *Madonna di Loreto* or the swollen body of Mary in the *Death of the Virgin*. Only the *cognoscenti* were able to see these pictures as works of art.

It is a paradox that Caravaggio's religious imagery, an art of the people for the people, was heartily distrusted by the people; for it can scarcely be denied that his art was close in spirit to that popular trend in Counter-Reformation religion which was so marked in the activity of St Charles Borromeo in Milan and St Philip Neri in Rome as well as in St Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*.²⁹ Like these reformers, Caravaggio pleaded through his pictures for man's direct gnosis of the Divine. Like them he regarded illumination by God as a tangible experience on a purely human level. It needed his genius to express this aspect of reformed religion. His humanized approach to religious imagery opened up a vast new territory; for his work is a milestone on the way to the representation of those internalized 'private' visions which his own period was still unable and unwilling to render.

The aversion of the people to his truly popular art is not the only paradox in Caravaggio's life. In fact the very character of his art is paradoxical, and the resulting feeling of awe and uneasiness may have contributed to the neglect and misunderstanding which darkened his fame. There is in his work a contrast between the tangibility of figures and objects and the irrational devices of light and space; between meticulous study from the model and disregard for representational logic and coherence; there is a contrast

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between his *ad hoc* technique and his insistence on solid form; between sensitivity and brutality. His sudden changes from a delicacy and tenderness of feeling to unspeakable horror seem to reflect his unbalanced personality, oscillating between narcissism and sadism. He is capable of dramatic clamour as well as of utter silence. He violently rejects tradition but is tied to it in a hundred ways. He abhors the trimmings of orthodoxy and is adamant in disclaiming the notion that supernatural powers overtly direct human affairs, but brings the beholder face to face with the experience of the supernatural. But when all is said and done, his types chosen from the common people, his magic realism and light reveal his passionate belief that it was the simple in spirit, the humble and the poor who held the mysteries of faith fast within their souls.

CHAPTER 3
THE CARRACCI

At the beginning of the last chapter it was noted that it is still customary to see Caravaggio and Annibale Carracci as the great antagonists in Rome at the dawn of the seventeenth century. The differences between them are usually summed up in pairs of contrasting notions such as naturalism–eclecticism, realism–classicism, revolt–traditionalism. This erroneous historical conception has grown over the centuries, but before the obvious divergencies to be found in their art hardened into such antithetical patterns, contemporaries believed that the two masters had much in common. Thus the open-minded collector and patron Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, who has often been mentioned in these pages, explained in a famous letter¹ that, in his view, Caravaggio, the Carracci, and a few others were at the top of a sliding scale of values, because it was they who knew how to combine in their art *maniera*, and the study from the model; *maniera* being, as he says, that which the artist 'has in his imagination, without any model'. Vincenzo Giustiniani clearly recognized the *maniera* in Caravaggio and also implied by his wording that the mixture of *maniera* and realism (i.e. work done directly from the model) was different in Caravaggio and the Carracci. Even though our terminology has changed, we are inclined nowadays to agree with the opinions of the shrewd Marchese.

Nevertheless it was, of course, Annibale Carracci and not Caravaggio who revived the time-honoured values in Italian art and revitalized the great tradition manifest in the development of painting from Giotto to Masaccio and on to Raphael. Caravaggio never worked in fresco. But it was monumental fresco-painting that educated Italians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries still regarded as the finest flower of art and the supreme test of a painter's competence. This approach, which was deeply rooted in their theoretical premises and historical background, was detrimental to the fortunes of the easel-painter Caravaggio. It helped, on the other hand, to raise Annibale Carracci to his exalted position, for, next to Raphael's Stanze and Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, his frescoes in the Farnese Gallery were regarded until the end of the eighteenth century as the most important landmark in the history of painting. And now that we are beginning to see rule rather than freedom in Caravaggio's work, we are also able once again to appreciate and assess more positively than writers of the last 150 years² the quality of Annibale's art and his historical mission. Once again we can savour those virtues in Annibale's bold and forthright 'classicism' which were inaccessible to the individualist and 'realist' Caravaggio.

One must study Annibale's artistic origins and see him in relation to the other painters in his family in order to understand the special circumstances which led up to the climax of his career in the frescoes of the Farnese Gallery. Among the various attempts at reform during the last decades of the sixteenth century Bologna soon assumed a leading