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INTRODUCTION

The Cornaro Chapel, situated in the shallow left transept arm of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, is hailed by many art historians as being among the greatest of Baroque masterpieces, and, as such, one of Gianlorenzo Bernini’s finest efforts (Figures 1 & 2). Various facets of the visual arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, marble intarsia—converge in this space as a harmonious whole, all in an effort to create and frame a scene of intense emotional realism and deep spiritual fervor. The vaulted ceiling contains a frescoed illusion of angels opening the sky as if it were a curtain, to reveal the glowing dove of the Holy Spirit (Figures 3 & 4). Light seems to emanate from this dove to the main scene below. There, two marble figures appear to float weightlessly beneath a golden light. This sculptural group features Saint Teresa of Ávila leaning back in a moment of spiritual ecstasy while an angel stands over her body, smiling, as he prepares to lunge a fiery arrow into her heart (Figure 5). The drapery of Teresa’s garment appears to expand unnaturally, as if merging with the cloud that cradles her body. The very fibers of her clothing could not escape this mystical union with God.

The space in which this scene takes place emerges from the rear wall and is framed by paired columns, effectively isolating the scene from the rest of the chapel while highlighting it as the centerpiece. Flanking this sculptural group are eight members of the Cornaro family, four on each wall (Figures 6 & 7). They appear to be watching from theater box seats, as if Teresa’s vision is being staged for them in a theater. Inlaid with marble into the floor of the chapel are
two roundels featuring half-length skeletons that join the Cornaro men in watching the scene of Teresa’s ecstasy (Figures 8-10). These characters appear to want to leap from the floor tiles that contain them out of joy for what is transpiring.

Bernini’s skeletons seem to encourage the type of response that a religious viewer in the seventeenth-century should have to a work such as this. Not all responses were as positive and joyous as those of the skeletons, however. One quite negative response has been preserved in a tract contemporaneous with the unveiling of the Cornaro Chapel, which compares Teresa’s appearance to that of a “prostituted Venus.”¹ Another sexual reference came from the French parliamentary president of Dijon, Charles de Brosses, who, in the eighteenth-century, is quoted as stating: “If that is divine love, I have known it!”² Regardless of examples such as these that demonstrate a negative, or, at the very least, an un-pious response to Bernini’s creation, the majority of contemporary opinions indicate that the sculptural group was met with acclaim.³ This fact alone speaks of the great skill and imagination that Bernini exhibited in designing this chapel. Considering the controversy surrounding not only Teresa of Ávila, but the practice of mysticism in general during a time of ideological warfare within the Christian faith, the challenges the artist had to overcome were

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³ Peterson, 45.
substantial. Bernini’s design needed to evoke a response of piety and devotion, while keeping the viewer at an intellectual distance from the potentially dangerous and controversial practices and beliefs of mystical theology. This thesis explores Bernini’s carefully crafted design for the Cornaro Chapel for ways in which the artist intended to control the viewer’s experience, both physically and intellectually, of the controversial subject matter presented in the chapel’s decoration.

THE SAINT: TERESA OF ÁVILA

Early Life

Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda was born near the fortified Castilian city of Ávila in 1515 to a wealthy family of wool and silk merchants. Teresa’s grandfather, Juan Sánchez, was a Jewish convert to Christianity and lived much of his life in Toledo, a city once known for its religious tolerance. Toledo held a large population of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the result of the actions of King Alfonso X, who in the thirteenth century, invited Jewish and Moorish intellectuals to his court for their expertise in science and literature. This mostly peaceful coexistence, or *convivencia*, lasted for nearly two centuries until Ferdinand and Isabella declared war on Granada. The expense of warfare had a

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5 Medwick, 11-12; Lincoln, 1-4.
negative effect on fifteenth-century Castillian society, weakening its economy.\textsuperscript{6} Many who remained financially secure were the Jewish families who had amassed great wealth and property in more peaceful times. Anti-Semitism increased as Christians became envious and suspicious of the Jews. This reached a fever pitch in the late fifteenth-century and resulted in the expulsion of any Jews who refused to convert to Christianity, as well as the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478.\textsuperscript{7} The Jews choosing to convert to the Christian faith rather than leave the country were labeled \textit{conversos}, and Teresa’s grandfather was among them.\textsuperscript{8}

Many \textit{conversos} were summoned by the Inquisition and accused of practicing Judaism in secret.\textsuperscript{9} Punishment could be severe and often culminated in public execution. Teresa’s grandfather proactively avoided the possibility of a death penalty by taking advantage of the Edict of Grace in 1485, whereby the Tribunal would have mercy on those that came forward and confessed to sinning against the Church.\textsuperscript{10} He confessed to sins unknown, probably minor crimes such as holding onto particular Jewish customs. His mild punishment was one of humiliation via a public spectacle. He and his children were paraded through the streets of Toledo for seven consecutive Fridays, each wearing a \textit{sambenito}, a

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{6}] Lincoln, 2.
\item[\textsuperscript{8}] Lincoln, 2.
\item[\textsuperscript{9}] Ibid., Also see José Faur, \textit{In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity} [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992], 42-43.
\item[\textsuperscript{10}] Lincoln, 3; Medwick, 11.
\end{itemize}
yellow robe decorated with green or black crosses, tongues of fire, and sometimes devils. The crowds that would gather were not discouraged from spitting, shouting, or even throwing stones. Teresa’s father was one of the children forced to participate in this spectacle.

By 1500, Juan managed to move his family to Ávila, where relatives still ran a successful silk and wool business. He quickly changed the family name from Sánchez to Cepeda, his wife’s maiden name. It was a new identity, a fresh start. Along with the new name, Juan succeeded in earning enough money to purchase a hidalguía, or noble status. Family wealth may also have played a part in keeping the Jewish blood in the family a secret for centuries, as we have only discovered Teresa’s converso family history in recent decades. Mention of her Jewish ancestry is mysteriously absent from Inquisition records, even those in which members of her family testified.

By all accounts, it appears that Teresa’s parents were devoted and faithful Christians, a trait reflected in the upbringing of Teresa and her eleven siblings in Ávila. Teresa wrote fondly of her father Alonso’s frequent reading of the “holy books” to the children and of her mother’s parental guidance toward a pious devotion to the Virgin and saints of the Church. Born among a new generation

11 Ibid., 12; Lincoln, 2.
12 Lincoln, 3-4; Smith, 7.
15 Teresa, 11.
of literate Castilian Christians, Teresa herself learned to read in the vernacular at a young age and immersed herself in the stories of saints and their martyrdoms.\textsuperscript{16} Such interest in saintly accounts was paired with her fascination with popular contemporary literature of the romantic and heroic adventures of Spanish knights.\textsuperscript{17}

These stories, both saintly and secular, would have a tremendous impact on her future endeavors—a fact that manifested itself almost immediately at the young age of seven. The idea of martyrdom, dying at the hands of sinners just like the saints she had read and learned so much about, was an attractive endeavor, and one that she desired greatly.\textsuperscript{18} In her autobiography, Teresa wrote of her childhood intrigue for the “pain and bliss” of martyrdom that would last for an eternity.\textsuperscript{19} The duality of “pain and bliss” is a theme that would recur in her own mid-life accounts of supernatural experiences with God, but as an ambitious young seven-year-old girl, it manifested itself in a desire to experience a heroic Christian adventure that would end in her own martyrdom and entry into Heaven. So greatly did she want to die for Christ that she convinced one of her brothers, nearly equal in age, to accompany her to Moorish lands to preach to the Muslims.\textsuperscript{20} Her brother Rodrigo agreed, and together they sneaked out of the


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 26; Lincoln, 13-14.

\textsuperscript{18} Cathleen Medwick, \textit{Teresa of Ávila: The Progress of a Soul} [New York: Doubleday, 1999], 244-245

\textsuperscript{19} Teresa, 24.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 24. Medwick, 9-10.
city walls with a handkerchief full of raisins for sustenance on their journey. Two small Christian children bravely marching to Moorish lands did not get far, of course, not nearly as far as legend would have it. Their uncle Francisco found them not far out of the city, on a dirt road to Salamanca, and returned them home. This early attempted journey in Teresa’s life is quite revealing of her mental capacity and the personality that would both inspire and frustrate those who would come to know or learn of this woman later in her life. As a child, she exhibited a level of determination, bravery, and fearlessness rarely found in grown adults. These qualities would only be nurtured and cultivated in the years that followed, and would contribute both to her fame and her criticism.

Career

In 1535, at the age of twenty, Teresa dedicated herself to the Christian charity, religious piety, and celibacy of the convent life at the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation at Ávila, Spain.\(^{21}\) Just one year following her vows, however, she suffered an unknown debilitating illness—one that for three years was ‘remedied’ by tortuous medieval procedures such as purging and bloodletting.\(^{22}\) This illness would return periodically throughout her life, but never seems to have been as excruciating and deadly as it was when she first entered the convent.\(^{23}\) Her illness in combination with medieval cures left her mostly paralyzed for an entire year. It was so severe at one point that Teresa was sent home to her

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\(^{21}\) Teresa, 33; McBrien, 422.

\(^{22}\) McBrien, 422; Medwick, 26.

\(^{23}\) Medwick, 31-32. Teresa entered the convent in 1535 and took her vows in 1537.
father, where doctors and nuns surrounded her for what they believed were her final moments. For four days, the young woman was in so deep a comatose state, that the nuns prepared her grave, wrapped her body in a shroud, and sealed her eyelids with wax. The acts were premature, however, as Teresa recovered suddenly on the fourth day—lending a semblance of a resurrection theme to this story. It must have seemed a miracle that this young life was delivered from the throes of death.

The rest and solitude that accompanies illness gave Teresa ample time to engage in reading and study. Through her uncle Pedro, she was introduced to the mystical theology of Francisco de Osuna, an early sixteenth-century Franciscan monk who wrote on mental, rather than verbal, forms of prayer in his *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. This practice encouraged a private conversation between an individual and God, rather than the repetitive spoken verses of Latin prayers and scriptures. Osuna also encouraged a silent listening among the prayerful for a return communication from God. This is a form of prayer intended for a higher transcendence of the soul, a more supernatural experience between man and God. Teresa was inspired, and followed Osuna’s lessons closely. This book became the cornerstone of the collection of literature on prayer that Teresa would amass in her lifetime, and a driving force behind her ideology.

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24 Ibid., 31; Teresa, 42-43; Lincoln, 28-29.


26 Lincoln, 26; Medwick 26-27.
In 1560, Teresa set out to reform the Carmelite order, which she believed had strayed from its original purpose. This sentiment began in her own convent, which had become not much more than a living quarters for unmarried daughters and widows of Ávila’s most prominent families. The asceticism inherent in the roots of the Carmelite tradition was absent, and this she blamed on the leadership that turned a blind eye to the matter. Rather than argue with the order’s leadership, Teresa established a new convent for herself and thirteen fellow sisters in 1562. The establishment of this convent, San Jose de Ávila, was accompanied by a constitution inaugurating a reformed Carmelite movement—the Discalced, or Barefoot Carmelites. To contrast the worldliness and promiscuity she witnessed at the Incarnation, Teresa’s reformed nuns outwardly showed their personal poverty and humility by participating in hours of hard labor while wearing brown wool habits and sandals. They slept on beds of straw, abstained from meat, and regularly practiced various forms of penance. Teresa’s movement quickly gained wealthy financial supporters who admired the simple and ascetic lifestyle of the sisters. The final twenty years of Teresa’s life were spent traversing the Iberian peninsula, establishing new convent houses in sixteen additional Spanish cities. Rather than dwelling in a convent, separated from the world outside and relegated to a life of prayer, she traveled by mule or

27 Teresa, 236-237; Lincoln 69-74; Rowe, Saint and Nation, 49-50.
28 Rowe, Saint and Nation, 49-50.
29 McBrien, 422-423.
30 Convents established by Teresa herself: Ávila (1562), Medina (1567), Malagon (1568), Valladolid (1568), Pastrana (1569), Salamanca (1571), Alba (1571), Segovia (1574), Seville (1575), Beas (1575), Caravaca (1576), Toledo (1579), Palencia (1580), Villanueva de la Jara (1580), Soria (1581), Granada (1582), Burgos (1582). In Rowe, Saint and Nation, 50, n. 6.
wagon, sleeping at inns or the homes of people whose support or sympathy she garnered.\textsuperscript{31} She proved to have a rich supply of administrative skills, which, when coupled with her reputed sociable and confident personality, won her the support of many noble patrons and supporters, including King Philip II. Such extensive travel quickly spread her reputation throughout Spain.

Concurrently with the establishment of her reformed convents, Teresa proved to be a prolific writer.\textsuperscript{32} The same year she set out to establish her first convent, work began on what would become her most famous work: \textit{The Life of Saint Teresa by Herself (Libro de la vida)}.\textsuperscript{33} Encouraged by her confessors to document her life and experiences, this extensive autobiography spans the length of her life from the age of seven to her fiftieth year. Intermingled with details of her life are chapters that together comprise a lengthy treatise on mental prayer that can lead to visions and mystical encounters with God.\textsuperscript{34} It is both confessional and instructive, often taking on the tone of a self-doubting and humble woman. Details of her interactions with various theologians and clergymen are included, as are the male confessors to whom she was assigned throughout her adult life. Melody Smith suggests that such details are included so frequently due to the patriarchal society in which Teresa lived.\textsuperscript{35} Her frequent dialogues with male ecclesiastical figures constructs an image of a woman who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Medwick, x-xii.
\item \textsuperscript{32} McBrien 422-423.
\item \textsuperscript{33} The common title for English translations does not correspond exactly with the Spanish title \textit{Libro de la vida} (Book of the Life).
\item \textsuperscript{34} J.M. Cohen, introduction to \textit{The Life of Teresa by Herself}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Smith, 3-4.
\end{itemize}
was submissive to authority rather than rebellious against it. “Her only option of survival,” Smith explains, “was to be honest about her experiences and submit to the discretion of male authorities [...] despite her own desires to oppose them.”

Domingo Bañez, Teresa’s confessor at the time of the book’s writing, knew well the dangers the writing could pose, even if carefully written in a submissive tone. Upon completion of *The Life* in 1565, Bañez reprimanded Teresa for being too liberal in her distribution of the book. The book’s immediate popularity was not the result of Teresa’s enthusiasm for its distribution, however. Her reputation had already been established. As J.M. Cohen states: “Fashionable Spain was extremely interested in this active and forthright reformer of convents.”

Mystical Experiences

As Teresa’s *Life* circulated throughout Spain, it quickly became the object of scrutiny. While her discalced convents were the initial source of her widespread reputation, it was her autobiography’s accounts of visions, levitations, and ecstasies (or, raptures) that would fall under the investigative eye of numerous theologians and the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Scattered throughout her autobiography are descriptions of mystical visions of Christ, angels, demons, and the Devil. She wrote of being “lifted up from the ground”

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36 Ibid.
37 Cohen, 11.
38 Ibid.
39 Rowe, *Saint and Nation*, 50.
40 For a few examples, see Teresa, 206-207, 222-226.
in states of levitation on occasions of prayer and Communion. Of ecstasies, she attempts to explain their characteristics but admits her efforts inadequate, for “we [humans] have not the capacity for such understanding.” These moments, according to Teresa’s attempted analysis, are often accompanied by visions and levitations, but are experienced more in the spirit than in the body, although, as she states, “both seem to share in it.” The result of an ecstasy is a heightened communication with, and ultimate revelation of, God. The paradox of “pain and bliss” she described being so fascinated by as a child reading of Christian martyrdoms manifests itself in these descriptions:

The help that comes from heaven is, as I have said, a most wonderful knowledge of God, so far above anything that we can desire that it brings with it greater torment [...] It is a harsh yet sweet martyrdom [...] I think that during much of this time the faculties are in suspense. As joy suspends them in union and rapture, here they are suspended by their distress.

The Transverberation

Her most notable and complete description of a vision that resulted in ecstasy was one that Bernini would later capture in marble at Santa Maria della Vittoria, and one that was included in Teresa’s bull of canonization by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. In this description of what has come to be commonly known as the transverberation, Teresa explains:

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41 Ibid., 136-137.
42 Ibid., 142.
43 Ibid., 140.
Beside me, on the left hand, appeared an angel in bodily form, such as I am not in the habit of seeing except very rarely ... But it was our Lord’s will that I should see this angel in the following way. He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest rank of angels who seem to be on fire ... In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one’s soul then content with anything but God. This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it— even a considerable share. So gentle is this wooing which takes place between God and the soul that if anyone thinks I am lying, I pray God, in his goodness, to grant him some experience of it.\footnote{Teresa, 210.}

The contradicting states of pain and bliss manifest themselves here under a veil of sexuality. The use of sexual metaphors as a means of expressing the supernatural union of a soul with God was nothing new to Judeo-Christian theology.\footnote{Medwick, 58.} The Old Testament book, *The Song of Songs*, had for centuries offered Jews and Christians alike a sensual and overtly sexual dialogue between two lovers, long interpreted among Jews as an analogy of God’s love for Israel and among Christians as the union of Christ with his bride—the Church.\footnote{Denise Larnder Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Roman Catholicism: An Introduction* [New York, London: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990], 211; Also see Herbert G. May and Bruce Metzger, preface to *Song of Solomon*, in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 815.}
Teresa was well aware of this analogy when she wrote the first draft of her *Meditations on the Song of Songs* (*Meditaciones sobre los Cantares*) in 1566.\(^{48}\)

The inherent sexuality in the tone of this Old Testament work was familiar to Teresa’s contemporaries, but the commentary on such by a woman was not. Women were generally believed to be more susceptible to temptation and sin than their spiritually superior male counterparts.\(^{49}\) According to one theologian with whom Teresa crossed paths in 1580, Diego de Yanguas, this was a dangerous book in the hands of any nun. He ordered Teresa to burn her commentary and expressed his concern over her desire to give her fellow nuns a theological education.\(^{50}\) Teresa submissively complied with the burning, but not before some of her nuns sent a manuscript as a gift to the duchess of Alba, thereby ensuring its preservation.

**Mysticism and Femininity in the Post-Tridentine Church**

Stark opposition to Teresa’s work took many forms throughout her life and after. The age in which Teresa of Ávila was born was not one that enthusiastically accepted mystical and charismatic experiences, especially those of a woman, and even less so of a *converso*, or person, like Teresa, of Jewish

\(^{48}\) Medwick, 155, 235; Lincoln, xxvi. In her *Interior Castles* of 1577, a veiled autobiography written when her original autobiography was in the possession of the Inquisition, she again references sexual union when she describes the journey of the mystical life through the analogy of seven mansions. Spiritual betrothal occurs in the sixth mansion, while marriage occurs in the seventh. McBrien, 424.


\(^{50}\) Medwick, 235.
descent.\textsuperscript{51} The \textit{letrados}, a respected group of Spanish theologians, considered such experiences to be signs of heresy—heresy, according to Victoria Lincoln, “of a kind to which those of Jewish blood, and particularly women, were most prone.”\textsuperscript{52} Mystical theology advocated a form of mental prayer, an inward, private communication between an individual and God, and this, as Victoria Lincoln explains, was a practice that was “suspect, a flirtation with heresy” during the Counter-Reformation period.\textsuperscript{53}

Mystical experiences and mental prayer among women were regarded with more suspicion since it was commonly believed that females had a predisposition toward sin, and sin could result in heresy that could lead others astray.\textsuperscript{54} Women were believed to be more receptive to the influences of evil spirits than men. Gillian Ahlgren notes a statement by the Dominican theorist Martín de Córdoba on this subject that reveals the common attitude toward the differences between men and women regarding spiritual matters: “Reason is not so strong in them [women] as in men, and with their greater reason men keep carnal passions in check; but women are more flesh than spirit, and therefore are more inclined to the passions than to the spirit.”\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{52} Lincoln, 22.
\textsuperscript{53} Lincoln, 41.
\textsuperscript{54} Ahlgren, 7.
\textsuperscript{55} Ahlgren, 7. Also quoted in Smith, 9.
\end{flushleft}
Even defenders of Teresa’s visions, such as Francisco de Ribera, a Jesuit priest and the author of Teresa’s first biography, had to manipulate this ideology in order to adequately defend the mystical experiences of Teresa. In his biography of Teresa, he wrote:

Those women who conquer their passions through strength and subject themselves to God are to be called men, and men who are conquered by passions are called women. This is not a result of bodily differences, but of the strength of the soul.  

Ribera here offers a dual view of gender identity—bodily and spiritual. Just as bodies can be biologically different in terms of gender, spirits can be gendered through virtues associated with masculinity or femininity. “In the early modern world,” Rowe explains, “virtue, asceticism, and strength were gendered masculine; anyone demonstrating these traits could thus achieve a masculine soul.” A feminine soul would demonstrate traits associated with females in the early modern world: humility and obedience. Anyone not conforming to Ribera’s ideology on the matter believed women were to be silent, prayerful, and obedient to male authorities. The ideological substance of this spiritual gender bias was prevalent enough in post-Tridentine Europe that the papal bull


57 Rowe, *Saint and Nation*, 51.

58 Ibid.

59 Smith, 9-10.

60 Ibid.; Ahlgren, 8.
recognizing Teresa’s canonization in 1622 honored Teresa for “overcoming...her female nature.” 61

The danger of mysticism was a relevant concern for Church leaders of sixteenth-century Europe. If mystical experiences were left unmonitored, theologians feared they could lead to teachings and doctrines that would undermine those of the Roman Church. 62 Mystical experiences above all encouraged a personal, individualized experience with God—an experience that could occur outside of Church sanctioned beliefs and institutional practices. Steven Ozment explains that the overriding “anti-institutional stance” of mysticism could be “adopted for the critical purposes of dissent, reform, and revolution.” 63

Martin Luther provided the Church with a perfect example of mysticism’s ideological dangers. Between the years of 1516-18, in addition to working on his Ninety-Five Theses and spreading dissent against the Roman Church, Luther was engaged with editing and providing prefaces to a well-known, but anonymously authored, medieval treatise on mystical theology—the Theologia Deutsch. 64 In the preface of his 1518 edition of the treatise, Luther made an interesting comparison between medieval mysticism and the budding new theology of the Protestant movement he inspired a year prior:

61 qtd. in Medwick, 248.
62 Call, 35-36; Rowe, Saint and Nation, 51.
64 Ozment, 15. Also known as the Theologia Germanica. It is believed to have been written in the mid-14th century by an anonymous author. There are two Luther editions. Nineteen chapters were published in 1516, and the entire treatise in 1518.
"I for the first time became aware of the fact that a few of us highly educated Wittenberg theologians speak disgracefully, as though we want to undertake new things, as though there had been no people previously or elsewhere [who had undertaken these things]. Indeed there have been others [...] Let anyone who wishes read this little book, and then let him say whether the theology is original with us or ancient, for this book is not new."\(^{65}\)

The Roman Church was well aware of the inspiration Luther found in this medieval text. In 1557, Pope Paul IV established the Index of Forbidden Books.\(^{66}\) All writings that followed Luther’s reformation efforts were examined and scrutinized, especially those with hints of mystical theology. Convents and monasteries were searched for blacklisted books, which were burned or otherwise destroyed when discovered. Pope Paul V, the same pope that beatified Teresa in 1614, placed *Theologia Deutsch* on this Index—a list it still occupies today.\(^{67}\)

Clearly, the post-Tridentine Roman Church walked a fine line between acceptance and condemnation of mystical theology. Such ideology and the supernatural experiences of its practitioners had the potential to either confirm God’s divine activity among the faithful within the folds of the Catholic Church, or to inspire dissent and revolution against the strict orthodoxy inherent in the Catholic faith.\(^{68}\) While the Church ultimately recognized mystical experiences as

\(^{65}\) qtd. in Ozment, 20.

\(^{66}\) Lincoln, 55.

\(^{67}\) Ozment., 16-17. For Teresa’s beatification, see McBrien, 424.

\(^{68}\) For more on the potential benefits and dangers of mysticism during the Counter-Reformation, a period that saw a rise in the number of Spanish and female mystics, such as Teresa, see Stephen Haliczer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy: Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain*, electronic resource [New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], OhioLink <http://rave.ohiolink.edu/ebooks/ebc/0195148630>, 4-5.
divine in some individuals such as Teresa, they remained warily suspicious and watchful of the phenomenon in light of the recent continent-wide revolution begun by one Augustinian monk from Wittenberg. Teresa’s age was one of religious upheaval and uncertainty, and a *converso* nun having ecstatic visions made an easy target for those that tried to protect the authority of the Church.

The Inquisition

In 1576, Teresa was summoned by the Tribunal of the Inquisition and interrogated for possible heresy. The papal nuncio to Spain declared her “an unstable, restless, disobedient, and contumacious female.” Her close friend and fellow reformer of the Carmelites, Juan de la Cruz (Saint John of the Cross), was kidnapped and imprisoned, and her confessor at the time, Father Jerome Gracián, was placed under house arrest. The Inquisition condemned Teresa’s collection of books, such as Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, for containing, as Victoria Lincoln explains, hints of “humanism, illuminism, Lutheranism, and similar pitfalls.” Teresa’s autobiography did not escape the wide-sweeping scope of this investigation. The account of her life had already been cited as inspiration on two occasions by condemned heretics. In an effort to more closely examine her claimed experiences and their related beliefs, she was

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69 McBrien, 423; Medwick, 196.
70 qtd. in McBrien, 423.
71 McBrien, 423.
72 Lincoln, 26. Illuminism (*alumbrados*) was another term for mysticism in sixteenth-century Spain.
73 Medwick, 126-127, 183.
forced to expand the chapters of *The Life* dealing with her visions, prayers, and ecstasies.\(^7\) This resulted in the autobiography nearly doubling in length. To the Tribunal, the spread of her reformed convents was seen as a possible viral threat, and her instructional guides to spiritual mysticism had the potential to spread her ideology even to those she could not reach in person.

The Inquisition may have ended Teresa’s endeavors if not for the efforts of two men. Domingo Báñez, one of the foremost Dominican theologians in Spain, became her confessor and spiritual advisor and wrote a defense of Teresa’s written works for the Tribunal.\(^7\) His defense was not overly flattering of Teresa and her works, stating, for example, that her book (*The Life*) “contains too much about visions, which are always to be mistrusted, and especially in women [but] while she may be deceived she is at least no deceiver.”\(^7\) He also explained his belief that her writings could be beneficial to “educated men,” as it would help them to better understand the confessions of women. On the surface his defense seems contrived, but it was a defense nonetheless that would encourage little resistance and opposition toward either Teresa or Báñez himself. It did not deny the need for the Inquisition to investigate her works, but did pose her as an unthreatening, possibly deceived woman in more need of proper guidance than a burning at the stake.

As Báñez defended her before the Tribunal, Teresa called upon the assistance of an even more influential Spanish figure—King Philip II. Teresa

\(^7\) Lincoln, 22.

\(^7\) Lincoln, 222; McBrien 423.

\(^7\) qtd. in Lincoln, 222.
authored a total of four letters to the king during her career.\textsuperscript{77} Knowing that the Carmelite order was one for which Philip had called for reform, she argued that the example set forth by her Discalced convents would only inspire and strengthen the Carmelite order. In the end, her letters must have inspired Philip to intercede. By 1580, peace was made between Teresa and the Tribunal and her Discalced Carmelites were given their own separate province from the Calced.\textsuperscript{78} In 1594, the movement officially gained independence from the Carmelites as its own distinct order.

Philip II also played a role in the eventual sainthood that would posthumously be granted to Teresa of Ávila. To Teresa’s benefit, the monarchs of Spain since the time of Ferdinand and Isabella had worked toward elevating the recognition of Iberia throughout Christendom through patronage of art and architecture in Rome, and, particularly in the case of Philip II and his successors, the making of Spanish saints.\textsuperscript{79} Philip understood well that the patronage of saints in Catholic Europe served more than a religious function. In the case of powerful monarchs, such as himself, canonized saints reflected and strengthened the absolute power claimed by the throne.\textsuperscript{80} Philip wanted to ensure that the world knew the piety of his Spanish people and that God blessed

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 23, 222.
\textsuperscript{78} McBrien, 423.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 171. Kathleen Rowe also points out that popes often beatified or canonized individuals as an act of goodwill toward a monarch. Such was the case for Diego de Acalá, for whom sainthood was given as a gift to Philip II for Spain’s efforts against England in 1588. Rowe, \textit{Saint and Nation}, 201, no. 33.
his land by recognizing holy individuals within it worthy of sainthood. He realized, however, that Spain, despite its efforts in petitioning the Pope on a regular basis on behalf of its saintly candidates, had been largely ignored by the papacy for centuries. Between 1198 and 1434, for example, only one Spaniard had been canonized—Saint Dominic—and he had spent most of his life in France and Italy. Philip II made efforts to change this. In 1588, after twenty-five years of petitioning, the power and influence of the Spanish King in Rome became evident when Diego of Acalá was canonized. Kings Philip III and Philip IV followed suit in this matter. In 1601, the thirteenth-century Dominican Raymondo of Peñafort received sainthood. And in 1622, Teresa was canonized alongside three other Spaniards: Francis Xavier, Ignatius of Loyola, and Isidore the Plowman.\textsuperscript{81} As Teresa stood beneath the spotlight of the Tribunal decades earlier, King Philip II must have seen in her the potential qualities necessary for sainthood. The combined efforts of the Spanish monarchs coalesced in the seventeenth-century, a century that has been described as “the century of Spanish canonizations.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{After Life}

Teresa died on October 4th, 1582 in the company of the nuns of the convent at Alba de Torres.\textsuperscript{83} Witnesses to the death spoke of many miraculous

\textsuperscript{81} Dandalet, 180. Out of the five individuals canonized in 1622, only one was not from Spain—Philip Neri (Italy).

\textsuperscript{82} Pierre Delooz, qtd. in Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{83} Medwick, 3; McBrien, 424.
moments that accompanied her passing, which, they reported, had occurred while she was in a state of spiritual ecstasy.\textsuperscript{84} According to these accounts, an unnatural light and a sweet fragrance filled the room, weeping and moaning could be heard from unknown sources, a tree once without leaves suddenly bloomed as a bedridden nun was healed of a deadly illness.\textsuperscript{85} The following morning, the body was placed in a simple pine coffin and buried beneath the chapel of the convent.

Teresa was buried without delay, but her body remained in its grave only temporarily. In the summer of 1583, Jerónimo Gracián, Discalced provincial and one of Teresa’s closest friends and allies, had caught word of her quick and unceremonious burial at Alba.\textsuperscript{86} He traveled to the city to exhume the corpse and return it to her home convent in Ávila—an action that was reversed in 1585 when the duke of Alba complained to the pope and demanded the return of her body. The initial exhumation was accompanied by reports of an uncorrupted body, still smelling of a sweet fragrance. Saintly dismemberment followed. Fingers, hands, eyes, and various bones or small easily removable fragments were taken by many who had access to the body and the proper equipment. Gracián himself made off with her left hand, delivering it to Ávila, but keeping a little finger for

\textsuperscript{84} Medwick, 245.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 3-4.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 4; Lincoln, 423-424.
himself. Such acts give evidence that her eventual sainthood was already foreseen by those that knew her well.

Teresa’s popularity only increased following her death. Philip II began immediately on the canonization process with a letter petitioning the Congregation of Rites in Rome for her sainthood. In 1597, he wrote another letter, this time to his ambassador in Rome, the duke of Sessa, requesting that he try to secure the support of the pope in Teresa’s canonization. This was followed by hundreds of additional letters from people of both high and low social status. The Duke of Lerma in his letter wrote of “the great sentiment there is in Spain concerning the sanctity and virtues and miracles of Teresa of Jesus.”

Much of the Spanish nation was inspired by their ambitious fellow native, and were eager to celebrate the sainthood of a Spaniard who was still fresh in their collective memory. Her eventual canonization, as Victoria Lincoln aptly states, “was a political triumph for the Spanish crown, a compromise on the part of the Vatican, and a defeat for the Inquisition.”

The opposition to Teresa’s life and work did not die with her in the convent of Alba de Torres, however. Upon publication of her writings, which had been

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87 Ibid. The left hand that Gracián removed was the same that General Franco considered a prized possession in the twentieth century. A finger still wearing rings is displayed at Teresa’s first Discalced convent in Ávila. Her heart can be seen at Alba. Her right foot is at Santa Maria della Scala in Rome. A piece of her cheek resides in Madrid. Other parts of her body are in Mexico, Brussels, and Paris. According to Medwick, the body was exhumed a total of five times, each time resulting in further dismemberment.

88 Dandalet, 182-183.

89 Rowe, Saint and Nation, 54.

90 qtd. in Dandalet, 182.

91 Lincoln, xl.
barred until her death by the Inquisition, various theologians composed briefs (memoriales), denouncing the contents of her works to the governing council of the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{92} Cathleen Medwick focuses on one specific example, the language of which is probably not unique among the collection of such briefs. This example comes from a Dominican preacher, Alonso de la Fuente, who wrote of Teresa’s approach to mental prayer as one that opens the door to the deceit of the devil and excluded the role of the Church in a person’s relationship with God—a remark that carries with it hints of Protestant accusations. Fuente did not fail to remark on the weakness of Teresa’s gender, either, questioning her desire to teach others on issues of theology, when women were not seen to have the intellectual capability or blessing from God to teach.

Further examples of criticism toward the saint’s life and work can be found within the controversy surrounding an effort by the Discalced Carmelites to not only canonize Teresa, but to make her co-patron saint of Spain along with Saint James the Apostle (Santiago the Moorslayer).\textsuperscript{93} This effort was begun, in 1617, three years following Teresa’s beatification. On October 24th, Fray Luis de San Jeronimo, procurator general of the Discalced Carmelites, petitioned the Cortes for Teresa’s promotion to co-patron.\textsuperscript{94} This petition was immediately counteracted by the archbishops of Santiago and Seville. Teresa’s supporters

\textsuperscript{92} Medwick, 247.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 248; Rowe, \textit{Saint and Nation}, 1-2; Kathleen Rowe, “The Spanish Minerva: Imagining Teresa of Ávila as Patron Saint in Seventeenth-Century Spain,” \textit{Catholic Historical Review} 92, no. 4 [October 2006]: 574.

\textsuperscript{94} Rowe, \textit{Saint and Nation}, 55-56. The Cortes was an assembly of representatives in Spain developed during the Middle Ages that participated with the king’s court in certain legislative decisions.
argued that Saint James the Moorslayer was no longer adequate as the lone patron of Spain because there were no longer any Moors to kill or expel.95 Teresa’s opponents argued that it would humiliate James, and in turn the Spanish people, if the patronage of a powerful military saint was shared with that of a woman. Philip III and the Cortes disagreed with this sentiment and sided with Fray Luis and the Discalced order, ratifying the petition and sending letters to each kingdom ordering the annual celebration of Teresa’s feast day.96 The decision did not silence the opposition, however, as the archbishops of Seville and Santiago intensified their dissent and refused to celebrate her feast day in their cities.

One opponent of the move to make Teresa co-patron, Archbishop Pedro de Castro, wrote a letter on behalf of Santiago supporters that initiated a harsh debate. He wrote: “Today a beatified maiden (doncella Beatificada) is preferred over these and other canonized saints in the Heavenly Court, made patron […] by secular hands.”97 This statement in one sense condemns the involvement of secular leaders, such as the monarchs, in elevating religious figures for veneration. But the more controversial aspect of the statement, and what sparked such debate, is the use of the terms doncella Beatificada in reference to the beatified Teresa. Doncella was a term used to describe an unmarried woman who is not a nun, as nuns were typically referred to as virgens.98 It was

95 Medwick, 248.
96 Rowe, Saint and Nation, 56-76; Rowe, “The Spanish Minerva,” 574-575.
97 qtd. in Rowe, Saint and Nation, 58.
98 Ibid., 59.
essentially a term to refer to non-religious, non-pious, and unmarried females—usually those of low reputation. Castro not only showed his displeasure in the thought of elevating Teresa to co-patron of Spain, but refused to pay her the respect of the beatification she had already received from Rome. Teresa supporters accused him of heresy for such strong language.

Such debates and controversies continued even after Teresa’s canonization in 1622. Castro and his colleagues were temporarily defeated in 1627 when Pope Urban VIII confirmed the Cortes’ earlier decision to promote Teresa as co-patron of Spain. But victory for the Discalced was short-lived, lasting only two years. The opposition from Santiago and Seville had further intensified, making its way to Rome, where, in 1629, Urban VIII revoked his previous decision and decreed that all images depicting Teresa as patron be destroyed.

In this age of religious upheaval, debate was inevitable in every strand of faith and devotion. The praise and admiration that Teresa inspired among those who knew her or knew of her reputation was met frequently with opposition and controversy. Both responses to her religious reform and ideology, the praise and the opposition, survived well beyond her death. It was on the heels of such conflict that Federico Cornaro commissioned Bernini to design what would become the most famous visual tribute to this controversial saint.

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THE PATRON: FEDERICO CORNARO

Acquisition of the Chapel

The setting of the Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, was built in the first decade of the seventeenth-century as the Discalced order began to spread beyond the borders of Spain. Following construction, the church was dedicated to Saint Paul and named San Paolo alla Conversione. This dedication was short-lived, however, as Gregory XV reconsecrated the church in 1622 to the Virgin in honor of a painting that was carried by one of the order’s members during a victory over the Protestants at the Battle of White Mountain outside Prague in 1620. The unassuming design, carried out by Carlo Maderno, consists of a nave uninterrupted by side aisles and flanked by eight small chapels, four to each side. A modest dome was placed over the crossing of the nave and the barely existing shallow transept. Also included in the building project was an adjoining monastery of the Discalced order and a seminary for the education of missionaries. This project was undertaken just years following the acceptance of the order by the Church, but it preceded Teresa’s canonization in 1622. As the church and monastery were being built, Teresa’s canonization process was in the midst of a forty year inquest—the longest inquest in the history of the Catholic Church.


102 The facade was designed separately by Giovanni Battista Soria.

103 Call, 34-36.
When Federico acquired rights to the left transept chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria in 1647, both transept arms and one side chapel were still available for burials. At the time, the left transept arm, now containing the Cornaro Chapel, had in it a temporary wooden altarpiece and a painting by Gerrit van Honthorst: *St. Paul Ravished to the Third Heaven* (Figure 11). Honthorst’s painting originally adorned the high altar of the church, but was replaced when the miraculous painting of the Virgin arrived from battle in 1622 and was given that most prominent location. The wooden altarpiece in the left transept chapel had always been intended to be supplanted by a permanent replacement, as was the temporary altarpiece that was set up in the right transept, which was then dedicated to St. Teresa. Irving Lavin has suggested that Federico’s choice of Saint Teresa as the subject of his chapel’s decoration in the opposite transept arm may have been an effort to elevate the status of Teresa among the saints. The left transept, as Lavin first noted, is “liturgically the nobler, ‘gospel’ side of the high altar.” Placing an altar to St. Teresa on the “nobler” side of the altar would have communicated her importance as a saint to those in the congregation. A quarter of a century after Teresa’s canonization, it must have seemed overdue to dedicate a permanent altarpiece in a prestigious chapel to the founder of the church’s order—an order with which Federico Cornaro had a professional history.

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104 Lavin, 1:79.

105 Ibid.; 1:196-197. The Honthorst painting is still preserved in the choir of the church, and was presumably painted between 1616-1620 during Honthorst’s visit to Italy.

106 According to Lavin, this altarpiece is now lost. The chapel is now dedicated to Saint Joseph. Lavin, 1:197.

107 Lavin, 1:79.
Life and Career

Federico Baldissera Bartolomeo Cornaro was born in 1579 to one of the most prestigious and successful families in the history of Venice.\(^{108}\) From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, eight Cardinals had come from the Cornaro line, including Federico, as well as three Venetian doges, including Federico’s father, Giovanni.\(^ {109}\) As the firstborn of Giovanni and Chiara Dolfin, Federico was destined from conception to fulfill the long Cornaro tradition requiring the eldest males to pursue careers in the Church. His career began officially at the age of fourteen (1593), when he was inducted into the Knights of Malta as Grand Commander of Cyprus, a position largely inherited from his great uncle and godfather of the same name, Cardinal Federico (1531-90).\(^ {110}\) The title came with virtually no actual administrative duties on Cyprus, especially considering that the island had been in the hands of the Turks since 1573. Nonetheless, it was a title that came with prestige and respect.

In 1596, Giovanni sent Federico to Rome, where he could observe the intricate workings of the Church and make high-profile contacts that could potentially further his career.\(^ {111}\) He was sponsored there by his uncle, Cardinal Francesco, who had built the Palazzo Cornaro adjacent to the Trevi fountain.

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108 Barcham, 21-23.  
109 Ibid. Genealogical information was gathered by studying the Cornaro Family Tree provided in Figure 3, p. 3.  
110 Ibid., 52-53.  
111 Ibid., 56-59.
Francesco immediately aided in advancing the young Federico’s career by resigning from his post as abbott of the Benedictine abbey monastery of San Bona at Vidor, relinquishing the position to Federico. By seventeen years of age, Federico had attained two prosperous titles and was one step away from a bishopric.

Federico remained in Rome until his uncle Francesco’s death in 1598. His return to Venice coincided with Pope Clement VIII’s visit to the former d’Este palace in nearby Ferrara. Giovanni quickly took advantage of the pope’s close proximity, and managed to purchase employment for Federico in Rome for 36,000 gold ducats. Federico would become a cleric in the Apostolic Chamber, handling papal finances and administrative duties. The clerical position required preparation and education, for which Federico was sent to Padua, where he attended the famous university and was educated by notable scholars such as Galileo Galilei.

In 1602, Federico received his doctorate degree and returned to the Palazzo Cornaro in Rome to begin the next phase of his career. He served as cleric for the next twenty-two years, with knowledge that his predecessors, such as his uncle Francesco, had also served as clerics before ascending to the ranks of bishops and cardinals. During this time, he made powerful friends and

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112 Ibid., 63-65. Following the death of Alfonso II d’Este in 1597, the duchy of Ferrara was ceded to the Papal States.

113 Ibid., 66.

114 Ibid., 70.

115 Ibid., 77.
allegiances that would assist in his eventual ascent in Church hierarchy. Between 1621-23, Federico won the admiration of Pope Gregory XV, resulting in a promotion of Federico to Bishop of Bergamo in 1623, just months before the pope’s death. The man elected to the papal throne that same year offered even further promise to Federico’s career. A former colleague of Federico in the Apostolic Chamber, Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, emerged victorious from the conclave with the title of Pope Urban VIII. Over the course of the next two decades, Urban would show favor to his former colleague by overseeing Federico’s greatest professional achievements. Despite the fact that Federico’s father had become doge of Venice in 1625, and Venetian law prohibited any promotions of ducal relatives by foreign authorities, including Rome, Urban elevated Federico to the rank of Cardinal in 1626. This was followed in 1629 by Federico’s appointment to the bishopric of Padua. Discontent among many Venetians followed these appointments as they displayed a general disregard for Venetian law. Doge Giovanni’s death in December of 1629, however, alongside an outbreak of the bubonic plague a year later, calmed the public outcry and redirected attention to more pressing matters. In 1631, Urban appointed Federico to the highest position he would assume in his career—Patriarch of Venice.

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116 Ibid., 114-116.
117 Ibid., 108, 120-121.
118 Ibid., 127, 140-141, 179.
119 Ibid., 127.
120 Ibid., 202-203.
Retirement in Rome and the Propaganda Fide

Federico retired from his position as Patriarch in 1644 and returned to Rome. As would be expected from a wealthy retiree, he is known to have frequently enjoyed festivities and leisure activities, particularly theater performances. His retirement did not conclude his work for the Church, however. In 1627, Urban had assigned Federico to the largest of church-sanctioned congregations—the Propaganda Fide. This congregation was established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, the same year as Teresa’s canonization, and grew larger in scope under Urban’s long reign. The functions of this Congregation were two-fold. One function was international in scope—the Congregation was to oversee the organization of international missionary efforts and the education of missionaries that would depart to the New World. The second function was mainly domestic—to reconquer, through preaching and propaganda, the lands that had been lost to the reformation efforts of the sixteenth-century. The education of missionaries to lands both domestic and overseas was carried out in seminaries, one of which was attached to Santa

121 Ibid., 300; Lavin, 1:78.

122 Barcham, 310. Barcham mentions Federico’s attendance at a comedy performed at the palace of Cardinal Aldobrandini along with Donna Olimpia, Pope Innocent X’s sister-in-law. “This was one of several similar engagements the cardinal took pleasure in during retirement.” It is interesting to note that Bernini staged a comedy for Donna Olimpia one year later (see n. 178).

123 Barcham, 160, 281-283. The Propaganda Fide is also referred to in literature by its longer title: Sacred Congregation for The Propagation of the Faith.

Maria della Vittoria. Although Federico joined the Congregation more than a decade earlier, he did not make his first appearance at meetings until 1639-40 during a two-year stay in Rome, when members met regularly in a small church recently designed by Bernini to act as Propaganda headquarters. When he retired to Rome in 1644, Federico not only continued attending regular meetings of the Propaganda Fide, but furthered his involvement by participating in a subcommittee that directed its efforts toward overseeing the education of students in the seminary at Santa Maria della Vittoria.

Federico and the Discalced Carmelite Order

Federico’s involvement with the seminary at Santa Maria della Vittoria must have had some influence on his choice of burial location and chapel decoration, but little more evidence exists that convincingly establishes anything more than a professional relationship with the relatively new order and its Roman church. It is known that Federico offered the order entry into Venice by granting its petition for a Venetian hospice during his patriarchate in 1633. But the hospice was not enlarged into a convent until 1646, two years after Federico’s retirement. Lavin asserts that, during his patriarchate, Federico “appointed Discalced as confessors extraordinary to the most important monasteries of the

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125 Barcham, 282-283.
126 Ibid.; Lavin, 1:86. Bernini’s headquarters for the Congregation was located in the Palazzo di Propaganda Fide and was built in the early 1630s. Bernini’s church was torn down in 1646 and replaced by one designed by Borromini.
127 Barcham, 283.
128 Ibid., 331-332.
Barcham’s more recent biography of Federico, however, clarifies that this assertion is unfounded and not supported by any of the hundreds of letters written by Federico during his years as Patriarch. Documented evidence of Federico’s relationship with the order, beyond that of a professional level, is thus far nonexistent.

There must be more to Federico’s story than we know, factors that would have contributed to his decision to build his funerary chapel in a relatively new church of a recently established religious order in a city other than that of his birth. A couple of instances from Federico’s biography provide possible indicators of a more personal connection to the order. Federico was living and working in Rome as cleric to the Apostolic Chamber during the reign of Gregory XV. Following the canonization ceremony at St. Peter’s in 1622, the year Teresa received sainthood, Federico accompanied the Pope and the Spanish ambassador on a procession through the city, when decorated banners were delivered to churches associated with the newly canonized saints. He accompanied the Pope again two months later, when a procession made its way from Santa Maria Maggiore to San Paolo alla Conversione. This procession was held in honor of the miraculous image of the Virgin carried by a Discalced Carmelite at the Battle of White Mountain, the image believed to have granted a Catholic victory in a tough battle with Protestants. The procession was followed

129 Lavin, 1:78.
130 Barcham, 333.
131 Ibid., 111.
132 Ibid., 112.
by a reconsecration ceremony in which San Paolo was renamed Santa Maria della Vittoria. Further, Federico would have personally known the Discalced soldier that carried the miraculous image that was honored in that ceremony. The soldier, Domenico di Gesu e Maria, was made general of the Discalced order in Rome and was appointed by Gregory in 1622 as one of the original members of the Propaganda Fide.\textsuperscript{133}

The level to which these circumstances influenced Federico’s relationship to the Discalced order and the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria is currently open only to speculation. But his dedication to the order, the church, and Teresa is certainly without question—proof of which is the expense and lavishness that he bestowed upon the church’s most noble chapel for his eternal resting place. Federico’s choice of subject matter in his chapel reflected not only his dedication to Teresa and the Discalced order, but his commitment to the efforts of the Counter-Reformation through his involvement in the Propaganda Fide. While some saw Teresa’s mystical encounters and the resulting writings as potentially dangerous and verging on the heretical ideas of the autonomy of Protestantism, it is apparent that Federico saw them as convincing proof that God still approved of and worked through the Roman Church.\textsuperscript{134} The fact that miracles and unexplained religious phenomenon were still occurring within the confines of the Roman Church could be interpreted as convincing evidence of God’s continued blessing of Church sanctioned rituals and interpretation of scripture. Through his

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{134} Call, 34-35.
appointment to the Propaganda Fide, Federico had direct involvement in creating and maintaining the public image of the Roman Church in a world suddenly infested with competing Christian ideologies. That he chose Teresa of Ávila in her most spiritual, yet erotically suggestive, moment of mystical bliss to adorn his memorial chapel demonstrates his belief in the power of this controversial saint to act as a symbol of Catholic Counter-Reformation efforts.

THE ARTIST: GIANLORENZO BERNINI

Federico received no bargain in commissioning Bernini for the design and execution of his funerary chapel, as the artist’s fame was unmatched in seventeenth-century Rome. According to his account books, Federico paid the exorbitant sum of 12,089 scudi for the project, roughly the equivalent of half a million dollars in today’s terms. Of that, 2,000 scudi ensured that Bernini alone would execute the chapel’s centerpiece, the Ecstasy of St. Teresa, rather than one of his workshop apprentices. Federico surely was thrilled to have the opportunity to contract such a famous and experienced artist for his chapel. But the meeting of these two men was likely only possible due to the state of the artist’s career at this time. For the first time in more than two decades, the famed artistic genius of Rome was not consumed with papal commissions, and was eager to reinstate a once glorious reputation to its former heightened status.

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“This Child will be the Michelangelo of His Age”

Gianlorenzo Bernini, born in 1598, was the son of Angelica and Pietro Bernini. Gianlorenzo’s first eight years were spent in the bustling city of Naples, the third largest and most heavily populated city in Europe after only London and Paris, and an important territory of the Spanish kingdom. Fate dictated that Gianlorenzo would be, from a young age, exposed to the competitive profession of the artist. His father Pietro was a successful artist, one that Filippo Baldinucci would describe as “of no small acclaim in painting and sculpture.” In Naples, Pietro’s Mannerist style could be found in the city’s cathedral, as well as in the Carthusian monastery church of the Certosa di San Martino. Prestigious commissions were also awarded by the Spanish viceroy, and later, when Pietro moved the family to Rome, by Pope Paul V.

Paul V summoned Pietro to Rome in 1606 for the purpose of executing a marble relief narrative of the Assumption of the Virgin for the Pauline Chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore (Figure 12). Gianlorenzo, only eight years old, had already begun an apprenticeship with his father, and upon arriving at Rome, also studied drawing in the workshop of Lodovico Cardi, commonly called Il Cigoli, a

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137 Mormando, Bernini, 4. Marriage documents refer to Pietro’s name as Barnino, which derived from del Barno, which referenced St. Barnabas. Various contemporary sources on the family, including the biography of Gianlorno written by his son Domenico, use the name Bernino.

138 Ibid., 11.


140 Ibid., 6-7; Mormando, Bernini, 6.

painter and architect that collaborated with Pietro on the *Assumption*. In the biography of Gianlorenzo authored by his youngest son Domenico, we learn that within two years of arriving in Rome, Gianlorenzo “had already begun working as a sculptor.” Numerous small sculptures exist in museums and churches today that may be by the hand of the young Bernini. All but one, however, have been the subject of scholarly disputes over dating and attribution. Agreement is generally reached only on the small *The Goat Amalthea Nursing the Infant Zeus and Faun* (Figure 13), which was likely made between 1609 and 1615, when Gianlorenzo was between the ages of eleven and seventeen.

The young boy apparently was seen as a bit of a prodigy in Rome, with a “reputation for possessing a mind that far transcended his actual physical age,” as Domenico describes. The second most powerful man in Rome, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew to the pope, took an immediate interest in the talents of Gianlorenzo and arranged for a private meeting between the boy and the reigning Paul V. Desirous to witness and judge the artistic talents that had been reported to him, the pope asked Gianlorenzo to draw for him a head. The result was a portrait of Saint Paul, apparently so well executed that the pontiff exclaimed: “This child will be the Michelangelo of his age.” The prosperous career that would follow Gianlorenzo from this point onward was initiated at this

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142 Mormando, Notes to Domenico, 284 n. 37; Mormando, *Bernini*, 28.
143 Domenico, 99.
145 Ibid., 30; Domenico, 98.
146 Domenico, 98.
encounter, as word spread throughout Rome of the young prodigy that impressed even the pope. But possibly even more consequential was the free, uninhibited access Bernini was given to the immense collection of artworks within the walls of the Vatican.147

Restorer of Antiquity

Domenico tells us of the long, laborious hours Bernini spent in the Vatican, from morning until sunset, drawing “one by one, those marvelous statues that antiquity has conveyed to us and that time has preserved for us.”148 The hours consumed in the archives of antique and Renaissance masterpieces no doubt had a tremendous influence on the dramatic and commanding style that would define the prolific output of Bernini’s career. So adept was he at his craft that in 1618, at twenty years of age, Cardinal Maffeo Barberini was planning to have him finish an uncompleted sculpture by Michelangelo.149 The same year, Bernini was hired to restore two recently discovered sculptures from antiquity—the Ludovisi Ares and the Borghese Hermaphrodite (Figures 14 & 15). The latter, attributed to the Greek sculptor Polycles and mentioned by Pliny, is a sensuously sleeping hybrid of male and female physiology. Bernini is believed to have

147 Mormando, Bernini, 30.

148 Ibid., 30-31; Domenico, 101.

149 Mormando, Bernini, 42. We know of this fact through a letter from the Cardinal to his brother Carlo. The work was not identified in the letter, and what became of the Cardinal’s intentions is unknown. Regardless, any artist even considered for the task of taking a chisel to a Michelangelo sculpture must have been highly regarded.
added the mattress on which this figure lies.\textsuperscript{150} According to the notes of artist Pietro Santi Bartoli, the \textit{Hermaphrodite} was discovered when digging in the garden of the recently constructed Santa Maria della Vittoria, home, to Bernini’s later creation of Saint Teresa in the throes of a sleep-like visionary trance.

Exhibiting the knowledge and talent of an antique sculptor, Bernini was a popular choice among the wealthy and powerful cardinals that came into possession of prized discoveries—of which there was no shortage in a century of continuous building and restoration projects in Rome. A drawing attributed to Bernini depicts a male nude in a horizontal position that closely resembles the \textit{Barberini Faun}, and may be a good indicator of the appearance of the satyr in a more horizontal position in which it is believed to have once been posed (Figures 16 & 17).\textsuperscript{151} The \textit{Barberini Faun} (or \textit{Sleeping Satyr}) was discovered in Rome during excavations in 1627 of the moat surrounding Castel Sant’Angelo that were sponsored by Pope Urban VIII, formerly Cardinal Maffeo Barberini. When excavators freed the sculpture from centuries of hiding, they found only a torso with a head, a right arm, and a detached and broken left leg.\textsuperscript{152} Similar to the reaction of European artists to the 1506 discovery of \textit{Laocoön and His Sons} near the ruins of Nero’s Golden House, the Hellenistic drama and eroticism of this

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\textsuperscript{150} Barbara Hughes Fowler, \textit{The Hellenistic Aesthetic} [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989], 148.


sleeping satyr attracted artists from the ends of Europe seeking to discover inspiration in its idealized and sensual form.\textsuperscript{153} Urban VIII quickly seized the opportunity to utilize his papal powers to declare the sculpture a possession of the Barberini family, going so far as to issue a papal bull establishing that the sculpture remain indefinitely in the ownership of the Barberini. While Bernini’s red chalk drawing depicts slight differences in the positions of the legs and head with those of the sculpture we see today, there are many similarities. The legs remain slightly spread, the left arm hangs from the side of the body, and the right arm is raised, bent, and reaching to the back of the head. This drawing may have been a study for the artist in planning restorations to the sculpture for the Barberini Pope. Bernini has long been thought to have executed the original restorations and provided the sculpture with the base that depicts a large rock with plants and a segment of a tree.\textsuperscript{154} Margarete Bieber attributed without apparent hesitation the stucco additions of a right leg, part of the left leg, the left arm, and the base to Bernini.\textsuperscript{155} Irving Lavin noted Bernini’s likely involvement in the satyr’s original stage of restoration, and traces the inspiration for the reclining, erotic pose of Saint Teresa in the Cornaro Chapel to his early experience with the \textit{Barberini Faun}.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{153} Raimond Wünsche, \textit{Gloyptotek, Munich: Masterpieces of Greek and Roman Sculpture} [Berlin: C.H. Beck, 2007], 175. A contemporary to the sculpture’s discovery wrote: “... ut universi qua pingendi, qua sculendi celebriores artifices in eius admirationem convolantes” (that all the famous painters and draughtsmen flocked to behold this in wonder).


\textsuperscript{155} Bieber, 112.

\textsuperscript{156} Lavin, 1:123, n. 59.
Maturity

Contemporaneously with his work as a restorer of antiques, Bernini created a few of his most acclaimed marble sculptures. *Pluto and Persephone* (1621-22), *Apollo and Daphne* (1622-25), and *David* (1623-24) were commissioned by Bernini’s early admirer, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, for his lavish suburban villa (Galleria Borghese), where they remain for the admiration of spectators today (Figures 18-20).157 This group exemplifies the culmination of Bernini’s early development as a master of marble. Hellenistic drama and sensuality reveal themselves in the writhing and twisting figures who appear frozen in the most pivotal moments of their lives. As Pluto prepares to escape to his underworld kingdom with Persephone in tow, his right hand, veins bulging in the moment of action, sinks into the skin of her thigh, as if the marble itself has the consistency of soft bodily flesh. Daphne’s marble flesh appears to effortlessly transform from body into tree as she turns in horror. The leaves sprouting from her hands were sculpted so delicately that they can be penetrated with natural light, appearing to flicker and glow as you circle the sculptural group. Bernini’s *David* was an innovation in the standard artistic treatment of the biblical Israelite hero. Rather than depicting a young shepherd boy in a moment preceding or following his heroic slinging of a stone, Bernini offered an athletic young man, with his hair disheveled and biting his lower lip with intense concentration, as his body prepares to reverse its spiral and hurl the stone that would save the

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157 Hibbard, *Bernini*, 45-57; For Domenico’s account, see Domenico, 105.
Israelites from certain defeat. The mid-action portrayals provoke the viewer’s imagination to finish the movements and actions of each part of the figures’ bodies, instilling them with a life rarely found in static works of sculpture.

The Roman citizens and friends of Scipione were so fond of these sculptures, that Cardinal Scipione is reported to have occasionally commented: “[My] villa had decreased in value from the moment that Bernini’s works entered it.” At first, this appears to be a slight against the artist, but as Domenico explains, the Cardinal was referring to the lack of interest his many guests suddenly had in any of the other prized works or meticulous gardens of his home. His guests would move immediately toward the rooms housing the Bernini sculptures, and would then leave to visit Bernini’s home, hoping to catch a glimpse and be in the presence of their own age’s Michelangelo.

Il Cavaliere

The artist they would meet can be seen in a 1622 engraving by Ottavio Leoni, depicting a bust of the artist temporarily away from his numerous commissions (Figure 21). He appears calm but determined, with disheveled hair not unlike that of his David. The emblem that dangles from a chain over his chest is that of the Order of the Cross of Christ. This was a special and noble knighthood bestowed upon Bernini by Pope Gregory XV in 1621, one year prior

158 Domenico, 106. Domenico reports that the Bernini used a mirror to carve David’s face in the likeness of his own.

159 Ibid.

160 Mormando, Bernini, 63.
to this pope’s bestowal of sainthood upon Teresa of Ávila. The noble status was
reward for the creation of a series of papal portrait busts, including one of
Gregory himself completed shortly after the 1621 conclave elected him pontiff
(Figure 22). From this point onward, Bernini was formally to be called Cavalier
Bernini, or Il Cavaliere. It brought with it all the expected social respect and
honor, as well as a handsome annual pension.\textsuperscript{161}

Minister of the Papal Public Image

In 1623, a new pope emerged victorious from the conclave following the
abrupt death of Gregory XV. Bernini was victorious, too, as the new reigning
pontiff was his close friend and established patron Maffeo Barberini, who then
took the papal title of Urban VIII.\textsuperscript{162} Both Domenico and Baldinucci relate a story
of the day following Maffeo’s election, when he told Bernini: “It is a great fortune
for you, O Cavaliere, to see Cardinal Maffeo Barberini made pope, but our
fortune is even greater to have Cavalier Bernini alive during our pontificate.”\textsuperscript{163}
The professional relationship shared between this wealthy patron and his artist,
as Hibbard states, was “unmatched in the history of artistic patronage.”\textsuperscript{164} The

\begin{footnotes}
\item[161] Ibid.; Baldinucci, 14-15; Domenico, 109.
\item[162] Mormando, \textit{Bernini}, 66; Hibbard, \textit{Bernini}, 68.
\item[163] Domenico, 111; Baldinucci, 15. The quoted text is from Domenico. Baldinucci’s account is
nearly identical.
\item[164] Hibbard, \textit{Bernini}, 68.
\end{footnotes}
only relationship worthy of comparison, due the scale and monumentality of the works produced, is that of Julius II and Michelangelo.\footnote{Baldinucci, 15. This comparison is perhaps what Urban had in mind from the beginning. Baldinucci related that Urban “had conceived the lofty ambition that in his pontificate Rome would produce another Michelangelo.”}

Urban had big plans for the city of Rome. In 1623, he made Bernini Minister of the Papal Public Image and Architect of St. Peter’s, a job essentially giving Bernini charge over the various construction and artistic projects in and around the Vatican, and a title he would hold for fifty-six years.\footnote{Mormando, \textit{Bernini}, 72; Rudolph Wittkower, \textit{Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque}, 2nd ed. [London: Phaidon Press, 1966], 17.} It was a job demanding of more than just sculpting expertise. To accompany his grand ideas, Urban needed an artist of all trades, and encouraged Bernini to sharpen his skills in painting and architecture.\footnote{Domenico, 112; Baldinucci, 15.} Bernini complied, practicing for two years his skills in painting. Urban intended to have him execute a grand fresco cycle in the Benediction Loggia of the new facade to St. Peter’s, a space roughly the size of the Sistine Chapel.\footnote{Domenico, 112; Hibbard, \textit{Bernini}, 68, 71. Domenico mentions more than 150 paintings by Bernini during this period as well as some of the collections they were in at the time of his writing. Howard Hibbard explains that most of these paintings are now lost. Hibbard also addresses the plans for the loggia frescoes and provides the scale of the loggia.} This was never completed, but the sculptural and architectural works of the following years would prove to be among Bernini’s highest achievements—and failures.\footnote{Domenico, 120, 128; Mormando, \textit{Bernini}, 74. Domenico claims the loggia cycle was never completed due to the nearly deadly illness that struck the artist. It is unknown why the project was never returned to following Bernini’s recovery. Mormando points out that there are no surviving preparatory drawings or references in contemporaneous documents.}
Urban first concentrated his efforts on embellishing the recently completed nave and facade of St. Peter’s. The crossing of the vast interior was in need of a permanent structure that would provide a monumental focal point over the burial site of Saint Peter.\(^{170}\) The Baldacchino, a soaring bronze hybrid of sculpture and architecture, satisfied this need by providing a bronze canopy supported by spiraling columns that rise to a dramatic height of more than ninety feet beneath the dome of the crossing (Figure 23). Begun in 1623, it was a project that would take eleven years to complete and cost 200,000 scudi—the equivalent of approximately eight million dollars.\(^{171}\)

**A Career in Distress**

As the casting and assembly of the Baldacchino was underway, the surrounding piers that support the great dome of Michelangelo were decorated with four larger-than-life-size statues of saints, placed in shallow niches on two levels. Within the piers, Bernini added passageways and stairwells, an addition Michelangelo had foreseen and for which had provided the proper engineering.\(^{172}\) The architectural modification of these piers would be the first of Bernini’s professional troubles in the coming years. On December 27, 1636, d’Este emissary Francesco Mantovani sent a report to the Duke of Modena informing the court of trouble in Rome surrounding an apparent crack in the cupola supporting St. Peter’s dome. In this report, he explained that “‘already for

\(^{170}\) Hibbard, *Bernini*, 75, 78.

\(^{171}\) Mormando, *Bernini*, 84.

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 89. For Domenico’s account, see Domenico, 124-125.
some time’ the newly appeared crack in Saint Peter’s copula has been a matter of public discussion, with the blame being directly ascribed to Bernini.” A charge of this magnitude would be serious indeed, as the massive dome of the church was in danger of collapse. It is known now that Bernini did nothing reckless in his alterations, carefully working with the original plans of Michelangelo’s piers. He also did not cut too deeply into the existing niches to make them larger, further weakening the structural supports, as some accused him of doing. Bernini would not be fully exonerated of blame by a papal investigative committee, however, until November 12, 1680, just two weeks before his death. But by 1636, a black cloud had formed over his otherwise fruitful and promising career. In his report, Mantovani noted that the entire controversy was likely instigated by a lawyer and writer, Ferrante Carli, former secretary to Scipione Borghese. For unknown reasons, Carli harbored a deep hatred for Bernini. So deep was this hatred that, as Mantovani explains, Carli wanted to see Bernini “exterminated” (esterminato). Whether from fear or joy, Carli is reported to have one day stormed out of St. Peter’s shouting “The cupola is falling! The cupola is falling! And Bernini is to blame!”

A similar incident occurred in 1641, bringing further challenges to Bernini’s competence as an architect worthy of his rank. When Maderno completed the facade of St. Peter’s early in the century, he left two mammoth foundations

\[\text{173 Ibid., 88-89; Mormando, Notes to Domenico, 313-314, n. 27.}\]

\[\text{174 qtd. in Mormando,}\ Bernini, 89.\]
intended to support campanili, one on each end of the facade. In 1637, apparently untroubled by the fears surrounding the cupola, Urban assigned Bernini the task of erecting these long-awaited structures. Having been constructed atop underground springs, the site of the facade was inherently problematic. Bernini was aware of this, so proper testing of the foundations was completed before work on the first (south) tower began. In 1641, the nearly completed structure was unveiled, awaiting only its crowning finial—a finial that would never reach its destination. According to the Giacinto Gigli’s Diario di Romano, it was only a few days after the unveiling ceremony that a third of the tower was deconstructed due to public dissatisfaction in its design. Aesthetic concerns were of little consequence, however, compared to the cracks that began to form in the facade below. The project was immediately suspended, and Bernini again was the object of scorn and criticism. The criticism came from all sides, including the Pope, who, according to a Roman avviso “severely reproached Bernini for refusing to heed the advice of others.”

Urban would not have to deal with the consequences of this ruinous commission for long, as his pontificate and his life were reaching their conclusions. Urban passed in 1644, leaving Bernini’s professional fate in the hands of a new Pope. Unfortunately for the artist, the man elected into the

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175 Hibbard, Bernini, 116-118; For Maderno’s work, see Howard Hibbard, Carlo Maderno and Roman Architecture, 69.

176 Mormando, Bernini, 137.

177 Ibid.; Urban may have disciplined Bernini for his own reputation’s sake, as he persuaded Bernini to build the towers larger and more elaborate than originally intended. Mormando, Notes to Domenico, 334, no. 22.
position, Innocent X Pamphilj, was a fervent enemy of Urban’s family, the Barberini.\textsuperscript{178} The disdain between the two families was spirited enough that many of Urban’s relatives fled to Paris in exile. The nearly empty papal treasury that Urban left behind, much of which went toward the projects completed by Bernini, certainly did not ease any tensions. Bernini, by association, was held in low regard by Innocent. While Bernini managed to hold onto his position as Architect of St. Peter’s, he was largely ignored for the first few years of Innocent’s reign.\textsuperscript{179} Alessandro Algardi became the preferred sculptor of Innocent’s patronage, and Bernini’s rival and former assistant, Francesco Borromini, became the favored architect. In 1646, Borromini replaced Bernini as architect to the Propaganda Fide, and immediately replaced Bernini’s church with one similar in design but grander in scale.\textsuperscript{180}

When Federico Cornaro arrived in Rome in 1644, what remained of Bernini’s tower at St. Peter’s was being dismantled, as was the career of the famed artist. Reconciliation between the Pamphilj and Barberini clans would occur in the years that followed, a result of pressure from the French with whom the Barberini had close ties.\textsuperscript{181} Innocent’s animosity toward the Barberini’s favored artist and architect would likewise diminish. In July of 1648, a work order

\textsuperscript{178} Hibbard, \textit{Bernini}, 116.

\textsuperscript{179} Mormando, \textit{Bernini}, 150.

\textsuperscript{180} Lavin, 1:86.

\textsuperscript{181} Domenico, 160; Mormando, Notes to Domenico, 348-349, n. 1. Domenico does not give much detail of the reconciliation. Mormando notes the involvement of the French in persuading Innocent X for military and political purposes to put differences aside. In 1653, this reconciliation was firmly established in a marriage between Olimpia Giustiniani, granddaughter of Innocent’s sister-in-law Donna Olimpia, to Maffeo Barberini.
was delivered to Monsignor Luca Torregiani, establishing his role as supervisor of a large fountain to be built in the Piazza Navona, and informing him to proceed with the design of Bernini. This, however, was more than a year after the chapel in Santa Maria della Vittoria was ceded to Federico Cornaro and plans were initiated for its decoration. When the paths of the artist and the patron intersected in 1647, Bernini’s career was in a state of uncertainty. To Federico’s benefit, Bernini would certainly have been determined to design a truly impressive work—one that would extinguish the uncertainties over his expertise and again direct the spotlight of Roman taste to his talents.

Master of Stage and Illusion

The challenge Bernini faced in this important commission was to ensure that Federico’s chapel would present Teresa’s most notable and sexualized moment of mystical ecstasy in a manner that would evoke piety and devotion, rather than dissension, toward the Church. For inspiration in this endeavor, Bernini turned to his already established experience in theatrical production. Through numerous mentions in journals, letters, and biographies, we know that

182 Mormando, Notes to Domenico, 349, n. 5-6. By all indications, Borromini was originally intended to receive this commission, as he was given orders to extend the pipes from the Acqua Vergine to the piazza in 1645 specifically for the fountain that would adorn the piazza. Borromini himself said this much in an entry for unpublished guide to Rome assembled by his friend Fioravante Martinelli (Roma ornata dall’architettura, pittura e scultura), and explained that Bernini had instead been chosen to rework the already established four rivers theme at the urging of Innocent’s powerful and influential sister-in-law Donna Olimpia. Bernini had staged a play specifically for Donna Olimpia in 1646, possibly winning her admiration and respect. In this play, he surprised Donna and the audience by satirizing and criticizing the Barberini family—a possible effort at gaining favor with the Pamphilj clan. See Mormando, Bernini, 123.

183 Mormando, Notes to Domenico, 348, n. 34. Mormando notes January 22, 1647 as the date of the acquisition of the chapel by Federico.
Bernini was passionate about the stage, and worked extensively as a playwright, scenographer, and actor. This is a rather understudied aspect of Bernini’s long career, for no other reason than the lack of surviving visual works for scholarly research. Theater sets and machinery were ephemeral in nature, leaving our knowledge of Bernini’s work mostly to contemporary written descriptions. One such account from the diary of English traveler and writer John Evelyn offers an example of the extent to which Bernini devoted himself to theatrical endeavors. In a side note to his description of Bernini’s Baldacchino, Evelyn writes:

> It is the work of Bernini, a Florentine sculptor, architect, painter, and poet, who, a little before my coming to the City, gave a public Opera (for so they call shews of that kind) wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues, invented the engines, compos’d the musiq, writ the comedy, and built the theatre.\(^{185}\)

According to this description, Bernini’s involvement in theatrical productions far exceeded just the visual quality of the stage designs. Baldinucci reports that Bernini would occasionally spend an entire month acting out each individual character in a play for the purpose of instructing his actors of the proper ways to execute their roles.\(^{186}\) He was a master impresario, adept at handling every aspect of his productions.

Domenico provides descriptions of a few of Bernini’s more elaborate theatrical productions. According to his accounts, Bernini’s special effects were so dramatic and realistic, that they occasionally caused panic in his audiences.

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\(^{184}\) D.A. Beecher, “Gianlorenzo Bernini’s The Impresario: The Artist as the Supreme Trickster,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53, no. 3 [Spring 1984]: 236-237.


\(^{186}\) Baldinucci, 83.
In *The Flooding of the Tiber*, the barriers that held a large pool of water on the stage were purposefully weakened, causing them at a specific moment to break, sending a rush of water toward the audience.\(^\text{187}\) As spectators began to run and climb atop the benches, trap doors opened to capture the water before it could reach the audience—a carefully planned sequence of events on the part of Bernini. A similar stunt was staged in *The Fair* when actors carrying torches appeared to accidentally brush the painted scenery with the flames of their torches, causing the set to ignite into flames.\(^\text{188}\) Domenico reports that one man was killed in the chaos that was sparked as a panicking audience tried to flee the theater. Yet, when the audience turned to check the progress of the fire before escaping, the scenic panels had been replaced with ones depicting a beautiful garden and the fire was not to be seen. Bernini certainly had a flair for spectacle and a desire to engage his audiences in exciting and innovative ways.

Bernini’s innovative spirit delighted the audience of a play at an outdoor theater. In this production, the name of which was not identified by either Domenico or Baldinucci, Bernini set up a stage between two audiences—one true audience and one consisting of hired actors.\(^\text{189}\) In the fake audience were actors that resembled and mimicked some of the more illustrious members of the real audience. The fake audience was, then, to be a mirror of the real audience. According to Domenico, this was an amusing entertainment for the true audience, to seemingly observe themselves observing a play. After the

\(^\text{187}\) Domenico, 132-134.

\(^\text{188}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{189}\) Domenico, 134.
performance, the true audience remained seated and watched as their counterparts exited and rode away in carriages, just as they themselves would soon do. It was a production that perfectly encapsulated a prominent motto of the Baroque, *theatrum mundi*, “the world is a stage.”

The Baroque period was a golden age of theater in all of Western Europe. As Mormando remarks of Bernini’s efforts in this medium: “Bernini was entirely a man of his times: he was doing what so many of his literate contemporaries were doing in Rome.” For Bernini, the medium was a powerful vehicle for the expression of his creative talents, ideas, and social commentary. Aside from elaborate stage productions, Bernini is known to have produced approximately twenty small-scale comedies that were staged during Carnival weeks throughout his adult life, often in his own home and at his own expense. These plays were less consumed with stage effects and relied more heavily on dialogue. With the artistic freedom and comedic bite of a court jester, the Carnival plays provided social and political satire aimed directly at the hypocrisy and extravagant lifestyles of the highest echelons of Roman society. According to Baldinucci, Bernini’s many theatrical endeavors were so fantastic that “whole books could be made of them, not without delight to those who might wish to read them.”

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191 Ibid., 1-3.
194 Baldinucci, 83.
THE CORNARO CHAPEL: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In no sculptural work is Bernini’s experience in theater more explicitly revealed than in the Cornaro Chapel. Scholarship thus far, however, has rarely gone beneath the surface of the marble and paint to analyze the chapel’s theatrical influence for more than its formal, visual qualities. Beyond mere appearances, Bernini’s visual reference to the theater may have been intended for the purpose of carefully controlling the experience of the seventeenth-century viewer of the subject matter in the chapel’s decoration.

Seen as a whole through the framing arch, the Cornaro Chapel becomes a stage containing a theater production (Figures 1 & 2). Present in the design is a standard vertical hierarchy that existed in many Renaissance and Baroque era stage designs.195 To create a well-ordered pictorial world, stage designers often arranged compositions so that a heavenly realm existed at the highest visual level and an underworld was relegated to the lowest level of a scene, often below the stage, where characters from this realm would access the stage through trapdoors.196 In between was the temporal realm of the earth, of humans, visually and metaphorically located between the eternal dwelling places of


196 Ibid; David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare’s Language of Gesture* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984], 99. Bevington states: “With painted heavens above and trapdoor (or doors) leading to the underworld below, the main stage could suggest the earth itself, the realm of human activity, set in the midst of a cosmic theatrum mundi.” Of the understage as representative of the underworld, Hagerman-Young and Wilks provide the example of the wedding masque in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, in which “the sub-human Caliban inhabited the hellish world of the understage space, accessible through trapdoors.”
Heaven and Hell. The realms of the eternal and the temporal would often in the context of a performance intermingle in the middle level. I suggest this same tripartite hierarchy was intentionally included in the design of the Cornaro Chapel to further the chapel’s visual association with theater. An example of this visual hierarchy in a theater setting can be seen in Giulio Parigi’s “Temple of Peace,” the sixth *intermezzo* of a 1608 production of *Il Giudizio di Paride* (Judgment of Paris), performed in honor of the marriage of Cosimo de’ Medici to Maria Maddelena (Figure 24).[^1] In this example, Parigi partially cut-away the front wall of the stage platform to reveal underworld caverns and figures below stage level. Above, the clouds open to reveal heavenly deities in the sky of the scene. In between these two realms is that of the earth, which is grounded on the surface of the stage and clearly articulated with man-made buildings that provide a sense of receding space through the use of carefully executed one-point linear perspective.

### The Pavement

In the Cornaro Chapel, Bernini’s underworld is represented by two medallions containing busts of skeletons executed in marble intarsia on the floor pavement of the chapel (Figures 8-10). These two half-length figures seem to rise from an underground location to meet with the living at the threshold.

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between two worlds, and they are pleased to do so. The skeleton to the left of
the altarpiece clasps his hands in apparent admiration, while his counterpart
appears with hands outspread in a gesture reminiscent of a prayerful orans.
Traditionally, as Irving Lavin observes, skeletons in the context of funerary art
typically function as memento mori. Bernini, however, reversed the symbolic
function of these figures. Rather than remind viewers of inevitable death and
judgment, these skeletons appear joyous and unthreatening, “as they rise in
prayer and exultation from the lower depths to bask in the light of heaven.”
A likely source of inspiration for this aspect of the design may have come from a
hymn written by Urban VIII in honor of the saint, in which Urban emphasizes the
intercession for souls believed to accompany sainthood:

O victim of love!
Inflame our hearts
And free from the fire of hell
Those entrusted to your care.

The skeletons, in their joyful poses, may illustrate those souls believed to benefit
from the direct intercession of Saint Teresa.

198 Lavin, 1:136.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid., 1:117.
Vertically opposite the pavement is the frescoed, vaulted ceiling (Figures 3 & 4). In this illusionistic heavenly realm, angels appear to move the clouds aside to reveal the white dove of the Holy Spirit, whose spiritual light radiates toward the scene below. Other angels provide music with instruments and throw flowers in celebration of the event taking place. These angels are accompanied by others, as well as several putti, modeled in white stucco on the arch framing the chapel. The shallow space of the chapel transforms into a seemingly infinite universe as the frescoed clouds overlap both the window and stuccoed scenes on the rear wall depicting moments from the life of Saint Teresa. The rational, ordered architectural space of the chapel dissolves into the faith-inspired space of a vision.

Four stuccoed scenes depicting moments from Teresa’s life decorate the rear and side walls beneath the vault. As noted by Lavin, with the exception of one, these reliefs closely follow the compositional designs of engravings by Flemish artist Adriaen Collaert for a 1613 illustrated account of Teresa’s life. A second edition of this collection of twenty-five engravings was published in Rome sometime before 1622. The narrative begins chronologically to the left of the

201 Ibid., 127-129; Wittkower, 25.
202 Lavin, 1:129.
203 Ibid., 1:129, 1:161. First edition: Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle, Vita B. Virginis Teresiae a Iesu ordinis carmelitarum excalceatorum piae restauratricis [Antwerp, 1613]. The second, Roman edition was issued by Giovanni Giacomo Rossi and is titled: Sanctissimae matris dei Mariae de Monte Carmelo Beatae Teresiae humilis filiae ac devota famula effigies. The Roman edition is assumed to have been printed previous to 1622 because Teresa is still referred to as Beatae (beatified).
window, where a scene from Teresa’s childhood is only partially visible beneath the frescoed clouds that spill over it (Figure 25). This stucco relief depicts Teresa and her brother being found by their uncle during their attempted journey for martyrdom in the land of the Moors. The corresponding Collaert engraving similarly depicts the uncle on horseback to the left of the scene, with Teresa in a brimmed hat and her brother to the right (Figure 26).

To the right of the window is a scene similar to the ninth plate of Collaert’s and Galle’s *Vita*, except that Bernini has reversed the positioning of the figures and excluded the devil (Figures 27 & 28). Teresa here is kneeling before an image of the wounded Christ, a moment she describes in her autobiography, although only her biographers included the details of the keys that she holds in the engraving, intended to be viewed as instruments of penitence. The presence of the painting of Christ alludes to multiple visions she described, in which paintings of Christ seemed to transform into the living Christ as she prayed before them. Perhaps to the artists, this moment was particularly powerful—testaments to the willingness of God to interact with humanity through devotional imagery.

The third relief decorates the base of the left side of the vault (Figure 29). Here, Christ again appears to Teresa, but on this occasion physically engages with her by placing a crown upon her head. Bernini strayed from the Collaert and

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204 Lavin, 1:130.

205 Teresa, 196-197, 199. “At times it certainly seemed to me as if I were looking at a painting, but on many other occasions it appeared to be no painting but Christ himself, such was the clarity with which He was pleased to appear to me.” Lavin compares this scene to earlier moments in Teresa’s *Life* in which she describes “calling up mental images” of Christ (see Teresa, 67-70). The later account quoted here seems a more convincing match for the illustration.
Galle engravings for inspiration in this composition. Lavin suggests that he instead considered a 1635 painting by Pietro da Cortona, *St. Teresa Crowned by Christ* (Figure 30).\(^{206}\) Whereas Collaert’s engraving shows Teresa kneeling in prayer with Christ beside her, the compositions of Cortona and Bernini depict Teresa with arms crossed over her chest as Christ arrives from the heavens on a cloud. It is a more visionary interpretation of the event that complements the visionary drama of the Cornaro Chapel.

On the opposite side of the barrel vault is the fourth relief, depicting the betrothal of Christ to Teresa, a union symbolized by the nail he hands her (Figure 31). This vision did not appear in her *Life*, but was described in a later writing, *Relations* (*Relaciones*). With the exception of the positioning of Christ’s feet, Bernini’s relief is a condensed version of Collaert’s corresponding engraving (Figure 32).

The Altarpiece

The stucco relief panels of the vault lay the narrative foundation for the canonical moment depicted in the altarpiece below. To present Teresa’s transverberation to the viewer, Bernini created a separate, isolated space in which this event emerges (Figure 33). This space naturally continues the architectural ornament of the rest of the chapel and church interior, but appears unnatural in that it emerges as a bulging, convex shape. Even the pediment that tops this emerging tabernacle appears to break open, only to reveal a twin

\(^{206}\) Lavin, 130. This was painted for the Carmelite church in Lucca.
pediment that unnaturally bulges outward. In the context of Bernini’s reference to theater, this isolated and framed space resembles a stage within the chapel.207

A concealed source of natural light that filters into this space takes on the appearance of stage lighting. To allow for this light source, Bernini took the liberty of breaking through the exterior wall of the church behind the chapel, creating a window chamber that allows natural light to filter into the chapel directly over the Ecstasy of St. Teresa sculptural group (Figures 34-37).208

Today’s visitors cannot appreciate quite the same effect that Bernini had intended. The outer window has been enlarged, and a modern electrical light has been placed inside the niche over Teresa. These modifications counteract Bernini’s design, which was originally meant to allow only a small, controlled amount of light through the corridor and into the space. This light, as it does today in greater measure, travels down the gilded wooden rays at the rear of the tabernacle, providing a soft, golden glow that reflects from the stark white surface of the marble below. Teresa and the angel, in effect, appear to materialize before the viewer’s eyes. This technique allowed the light to act as an artistic medium, interacting harmoniously with the gilding of the sculpted rays and the white marble of the sculptural group.209 It was a visionary way to present a mystical moment while visually harmonizing with the existing structure.

207 Hibbard, 128, 130. Hibbard rightly refers to the architectural framing of Teresa as a “proscenium-like opening.”


209 Ibid.; Hibbard, 134.
Teresian iconography had not developed into a fully mature history of formulaic poses and symbolic devices by 1647 when Bernini began his plans for the chapel, but scenes of the transverberation had become popular in both paint and print as her published writings and Discalced convents spread throughout Catholic Europe.\textsuperscript{210} Collaert and Galle included an engraving of the theme in their 1613 collection of narrative prints (Figure 38).\textsuperscript{211} This scene takes place at the threshold of a chapel. Angels pour into the scene from the clouds above, accompanied by Christ and the Holy Spirit, as one angel prepares to lunge a long spear into a kneeling Teresa’s chest. Completed a few years later, another engraving by Flemish printmaker Antonius II Wierix depicts Teresa in a similar kneeling position to that of Collaert’s, and Christ and the Holy Spirit are again present (Figure 39).\textsuperscript{212} Wierix, however, has reimagined the event as one where Mary and Joseph guide the arrows shot into Teresa’s heart not by an angel, but by the Christ child. These innovations make reference to the death of the saint, and may have had an influence on Bernini’s design—a point to which we shall return.

\textsuperscript{210} Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision,” 509. It is worth noting here that the destruction of Teresa-as-patron imagery decreed by Pope Urban VIII in 1629 surely resulted in an abundant loss of early Teresian iconography.

\textsuperscript{211} Lavin, Checklist to Unity of the Visual Arts, 1:161-165. The examples of Teresian iconography provided here can be found in Lavin’s “Checklist” in the first volume Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts. Lavin provides twenty-six examples with provenance information, but does not include commentary on the works.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid, no. 15. This is assumed to have been made after 1622, due to the reference of Teresa as a saint. Wierix is believed to have died in 1624.
A 1614 painting by Peter Paul Rubens, *The Transverberation of St. Teresa with Christ*, is different still (Figure 40). The angel here is relegated to the background behind a prominent, glowing Christ. Still holding the arrow, this angel gazes at the face of Christ rather than Teresa as the right hand of Christ seems to reach out and guide the arrow himself. Bernardo Strozzi’s 1610-15 painting, *Transverberation of St. Teresa*, distills the details of the event to the two main characters, the angel and Teresa, and places them in an ambiguous setting (Figure 41). A bright, clouded mass surrounds the angel, but Christ and the Holy Spirit are not present. In an interesting turn of events, Teresa is depicted turning in apparent horror from the angel, but remains in a submissive, kneeling position.

Bernini surely considered examples such as these as he prepared his studies for the altarpiece of the Cornaro Chapel. The similarities between his sculptural composition and previous interpretations of the event, however, are not as significant or consequential as the differences. One unifying element of the various earlier transverberation scenes is the placement of Teresa in a kneeling, submissive position. Even when she appears to be falling back in response to the penetration of her heart, as in Wierix’s engraving, she does so in a kneeling position. Bernini rejected this common pose by depicting Teresa reclining totally on her back and cradled by a cloud. Further, while most previous depictions of the event illustrated Teresa in gestures that expressed prayer, humility, or active

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213 Ibid., no. 6. Rubens painted this scene for the Carmelites of Brussels in 1614. It was destroyed by fire in London in 1940.

214 Ibid., no. 7.
acceptance, Bernini allowed her arms to fall limp beside her. Rather than actively and consciously participating in the moment, she passively succumbs to the divine experience. As such, hidden beneath the energetically expanding garment is a pose that seems to reference Bernini’s earlier experience with the erotically charged Barberini Faun. To view this innovative pose in purely carnal terms, it is, as is Teresa’s description of the vision, a sexually suggestive scene. An anonymous critic that visited the chapel shortly after its dedication commented on this apparent eroticism, stating: “[Bernini has] dragged that most pure Virgin down to the ground, transforming her into a Venus who was not only prostrate, but prostituted as well.”

Teresa’s reclining pose, while drawing attention to sexual undertones of the described mystical encounter, allowed Bernini to use this sculptural group to reference more than just the transverberation. What we see in the Cornaro Chapel is a concise visual summary of Teresa’s more notable mystical experiences—visions, levitations, ecstasies, and even her death. These mystical experiences, according to Teresa’s descriptions, were separate but often related occurrences. The transverberation, in fact, was not an occurrence of ecstasy, but a vision that resulted in ecstasy. Teresa prefaced her description of the event by stating, “Our Lord was pleased that I should sometimes see a vision

215 Lavin, 1:110. “...the shift from active to passive signifies a basic reinterpretation of the vision: rather than an event in which Teresa takes part, it is an experience she endures.”

216 See pp. 34-35 above.

217 qtd. in Wittkower, 254; Petersson, 45; Mormando, 161-162. Wittkower cites the source of this quote to a tract published in Giovanni Previtali, “Il Constantino messo alla berlina o bernina su la porta di S. Pietro,” Paragone XIII [1962], 55-58.

of the kind.”

It was the “pain” and “bliss” that accompanied this particular vision that led to a state of ecstasy. Teresa wrote on one occasion, that “in ecstasy come true revelations, great favors and visions, all of which help to humble and strengthen the soul.”

Bernini’s sculptural arrangement captures written descriptions of each of these separate mystical occurrences and combines them into a single descriptive motif.

Teresa describes the onset of visions as occurring with “a soft whiteness and infused radiance.” This particular description accompanies an account of a vision of Christ in his resurrected body “as it appears in paintings”; a vision not unlike that depicted in the stucco relief panel to the right of the window in the vault of the chapel. The white light “is not a dazzling radiance,” she explains, but a light unlike any earthly comparison. An entire paragraph follows that attempts to describe the quality of this visionary “soft” and “infused radiance.”

Comparisons of her description and one that might accompany that of Bernini’s carefully crafted natural illumination of the sculptural group in the Cornaro Chapel are warranted and may explain the artist’s efforts to puncture the exterior wall of the church to allow a soft light to reflect from the golden rays and polished marble.

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220 Ibid., 210-211. “I had no wish to look or to speak, only to embrace my pain, which was a greater bliss than all created things could give me. [...] But when this pain of which I am now speaking begins, the Lord seems to transport the soul and throw it into an ecstasy.”

221 Teresa, 151.

222 Teresa, 196-197; see also Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision,” 510.
Bernini’s light signals the onset of a vision, and closely follows Teresa’s personal description.

Ecstasies occasionally accompany visions. While Teresa, throughout her writings, struggled with a proper description of ecstasy, she did inform her reader of a certain paralysis that accompanies the spiritual state. “The body is very often like a corpse, unable to do anything of itself,” she explains, and “none of the senses perceives or knows what is taking place.” Bernini’s depiction of Teresa in ecstasy more closely relates to Teresa’s own descriptions than those depicting a consciously aware, kneeling and gesturing woman. Bernini’s passively reclining Teresa appears unconscious, powerless, immobile—hers is a phenomenon that engages only the spiritual senses, leaving the mind and body temporarily suspended.

These divine manifestations in one’s soul dematerialize the body in such a way that the bonds of gravity no longer apply. Along with paralysis, Teresa’s ecstatic state sometimes resulted in what she called “elevation,” or “flight of the spirit.” These occurrences are today more commonly referred to as levitations, of which she described: “Very often they [ecstasies] seemed to leave my body as light as if it had lost all its weight, and sometimes so light that I hardly knew if my feet were touching the ground.” Earlier in the same chapter she provides a


224 Teresa, 142.

225 Ibid., 142. See also Warma, “Ecstasy and Vision,” 509.

226 Teresa, 142.
nearly identical description specifically related to occurrences of levitation. Here, however, she goes on to provide visual imagery to illustrate the experience: “it comes as a quick and violent shock; you see and feel this cloud, or this powerful eagle rising and bearing you up on its wings.”

The addition of a cloud beneath Teresa’s body was an innovation of Bernini’s treatment of this theme, and seems to derive directly from this description of levitation, as no rising cloud is included specifically in the transverberation account. Bernini dramatically enhanced the visual reference to levitation by carving the group in such a way that it required no physical contact with the floor beneath. The entire sculptural group—the angel, Teresa, and the cloud—are carved from a single block of marble that is hollowed out in the back to relieve its weight, a technique that allowed for its secure suspension above the floor via a horizontal metal rod that attaches the marble spine of the angel’s back to the rear wall of the chapel.

Discernible in Bernini’s altarpiece are allusions to the moment of Teresa’s death, which according to witnesses, was truly miraculous. Teresa was said to have died in a state of ecstasy after receiving the Eucharist and offering prayers of praise to her divine spouse. The act of Communion preceding her death is alluded to in the gilded bronze relief of the Last Supper that adorns the front of altar below (Figure 42). Directly above, the transverberation acts as a mystical

227 Ibid., 136.
228 Lavin, 1:113. Lavin mentions the thematic innovation of Bernini’s introduction of the cloud, but makes no reference of its relationship with Teresa’s levitations.
229 Ibid., 1:202.
230 Ibid., 1:114; Medwick, 245.
231 For more on this relief, see Lavin, 1:125-126.
manifestation of the receiving of Christ into one’s self that is believed to supernaturally occur during this ritual. At her death, the manifestation of Teresa’s union with Christ was solidified through the appearance of Christ with his earthly parents. According to D. de Yepes’ 1606 biography, this heavenly visitation was reported by two witnesses present at her death, and was confirmed by nuns afterward that reported hearing of the visitation from a postmortem appearance of Teresa herself. De Yepes’ account of Teresa’s death was legitimized by the papal bull of Teresa’s canonization, and explains the presence of the holy family in Wierix’s aforementioned print (Figure 38). Collaert and Galle also included the holy family in their engraved scene of Teresa’s death (Figure 43), but Wierix appears to be the first to combine her death with the transverberation. Lavin suggests that Wierix’s print may have provided Bernini with the inspiration to include symbolic references to Teresa’s death alongside her mystical experiences.

In visually referencing her death, however, Bernini chose not to depict the presence of the holy family. Other details of her death were chosen for a more subtle and less complicated visual narrative. For example, witnesses present at Teresa’s death reported the sudden flowering of a barren tree in the cloister of the convent, a detail that may explain the frescoed angels of the chapel’s vault that scatter bloomed flowers and garland throughout the illusionistic sky. Witnesses also reported that Teresa’s sixty-seven year old body suddenly

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233 Ibid., 1:116.
reverted to its beautiful, youthful state.\textsuperscript{234} Bernini’s sculpture reveals little of her body, but the exposed face is certainly not that of a woman of nearly seventy, worn from twenty years of continuous travel, entrepreneurial work, and the stress of life-threatening accusations (Figure 44). Aside from the face, the left foot of Bernini’s Teresa was given special emphasis (Figure 45). In one sense, this may have been a symbolic reference to her Discalced order, but in another, suggests the accounts of Teresa’s “alabaster foot,” which, as Medwick notes, was the only part of Teresa’s body left exposed for the visitors to kiss before her burial.\textsuperscript{235} The desire to portray Teresa in death offered the saint a visual narrative that linked her passing to the many martyrdoms of previous saints whose death was a direct result of their undying faith. While as a child she actively sought martyrdom by the hands of the Moors, it was a “sweeter death,” as Urban VIII wrote in his hymn to Teresa, that took her in the end.\textsuperscript{236} Hers was a spiritual martyrdom—a death not caused because of her faith, but one caused by her faith.

Suspended in levitation, bathed in visionary light, gripped with the paralyzing pain and bliss of ecstasy while passing into the permanent existence of the afterlife, Bernini’s Cornaro altarpiece depicts more than the transverberation event. Teresa’s visions, levitations, ecstasies, and death are woven together in a static representation of a play in four acts. In the isolated space of her tabernacle, Bernini set the stage for Teresa’s most notable

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{235} Medwick, 3. Lavin’s analysis does not mention this correlation between Bernini’s design and Teresa’s death.

\textsuperscript{236} Urban’s hymn appears in translation in Lavin, 1:117.
canonical moments—all aspects of her biography that were under close investigation throughout the many years of her canonization proceedings, and all ultimately substantiated by the Church.

The Cornaro Portraits

With Teresa confined to the center of the chapel, Bernini utilized the two sides of the space for niches containing sculpted group portraits of eight prominent and successful members of the Cornaro family, seven cardinals and one Venetian doge (Figures 6 & 7).\textsuperscript{237} Only three of these figures can be positively identified: Doge Giovanni (1551-1629) is to the far right of the left niche; next to him is Cardinal Marco (1478-1524); and the second figure to the right of the opposite niche is Federico (Figures 46 & 47).\textsuperscript{238} Federico’s distinctive cheekbones, mustache, and goatee can be identified in a painting by Bernardo Strozzi, likely executed in Venice during Federico’s patriarchate (Figure 48). With the exception of Federico’s portrait, the groups are largely generalized and typically attributed to workshop assistants. Wittkower attributes the entire lefthand group to Ercole Ferrata, but provides no reasoning to support the claim.\textsuperscript{239} Federico’s bust, as both Wittkower and Lavin note, stands out among

\textsuperscript{237} Wittkower, 217. Six of the Cardinals lived in the sixteenth century. The doge was Federico’s father.

\textsuperscript{238} Lavin, 1:200-201; Barcham, 23, 28. Lavin notes that Giovanni is seen in a painting by Filippo Zaniberti in the Museo Correr. Marco Cornaro can be identified in an eighteenth-century Cornaro family monument at San Nicolo da Tolentino in Venice. Dates of birth and death are taken from Barcham.

\textsuperscript{239} Wittkower, 217.
the others in detail and handling, being the only portrait with finely incised pupils and irises, and for this reason is believed to be by the hand of Bernini.\textsuperscript{240}

The niches in which these portraits are situated project slightly from the wall, appearing as balconies and often compared to theater box seats, which were making their first appearance in the public opera houses of Venice concurrently with the design of this chapel.\textsuperscript{241} At least four of these theaters were constructed in Venice during Federico’s patriarchate, between 1631-1644. These structures and their corresponding plans do not survive, but a miniature by Alfonso Chenda depicting a Bolognese theater with tiers of loge balconies is dated 1639, demonstrating that the style was already spreading outside of the city of Venice by that year (Figure 49).

The backgrounds of these niches do not appear to be those of theater interiors, however. Sculpted in low relief, the backgrounds depict long corridors with barrel-vaulted ceilings supported by columns. Irving Lavin has observed that this style of interior architecture resembles that of the entrance vestibule of the Farnese palace in Rome (Figure 50).\textsuperscript{242} The design also seems to foreshadow Bernini’s Scala Regia in St. Peter’s, which he would design over a decade later (Figures 51 & 52). These architectural settings all share a common function—they are places of transition, halls that allow people to travel from one place to another. Lavin believes this is significant, as it would suggest that these

\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., Lavin, 1:200-201.

\textsuperscript{241} Lavin, 1:93.

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 1:97. A similar example can be seen in the vestibule that connects the church and sacristy of Santo Spirito in Florence, built according to Giuliano da Sangallo’s design in the 1490s.
niches are locations where two worlds meet. The Cornaro men have traveled through the spiritual realm to meet the physical, earthly dwelling of the viewers.

These men appear animated and alive, psychologically engaged, as they discuss, read, and observe the performance they are witnessing. Two figures in the right niche peer out into the nave, as if the presence of the living has been noticed. Federico himself is one such figure. The line of Federico’s sight is directed down the length of the nave as if toward approaching visitors (Figure 53). The Cardinal beside Federico leans emphatically out of the balcony and turns his head (Figure 54). The line of his sight is directed toward the center of the nave in front of the chapel (Figures 1 & 2).

From this vantage point, twenty-five feet from St. Teresa and directly beneath the dome of the Church’s crossing, the lines of the architectural relief in the niches behind the Cornaro men become nearly horizontal and create a plane parallel to the rear wall of the Chapel. The architectural elements seen in the reliefs work together to create a linear perspective that unifies these separate niches with the chapel space as a whole. This device creates a picture that is inherent to perspectival stage settings. At Palladio’s famous Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (1580-1584), for example, the two stage doors that flank the central, larger opening were intended not only to permit the entrances and exits of characters, but to present perspective scenery that unified the stage setting into one complete picture (Figure 55 & 56). Sheldon Cheney believes this use of unified perspective on

243 Lavin, 1:97-98

the stage at the Teatro Olimpico is “the first step toward our modern picture-frame stage.” Nearly seven decades later, Bernini was applying this aesthetic to the design of the Cornaro Chapel. The Cardinals’ gazes, then, seem to indicate Bernini’s intended ideal vantage point of the viewer—one that encourages the viewer to become audience to a unified stage setting.

Bernini’s *Theatrum Mundi*

The picture that Bernini chose to offer visitors from the center of the crossing is a stunning example of Baroque imagination. From there, the entire chapel comes into focus, allowing the viewer to see the vaulted ceiling being opened by angels to reveal the Holy Spirit descending from Heaven. Light from the Holy Spirit is at first illusionistic, but then transforms into natural light that radiates from an unseen location and gently reveals Teresa in the deepest throes of her mystical experiences. From this vantage point, the viewer simultaneously sees the Cornaro men watching and talking from their prominent box-seats. These men are at once in the viewer’s realm, as active witnesses to this vision, and separated from the viewer by their elevated positions. They seem to watch and discuss not only the vision taking place before them but the viewer’s response to the vision. The Cornaro Chapel, when seen as a picture in its entirety, is a space where architecture, painting, sculpture, and light are woven together into one medium to reveal a space that exists somewhere between Heaven and Earth, between time and space, between God and mankind.

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From this ideal location the entire space of the chapel is seen within the confines of the large arch framing the chapel. This arch, in the context of theater, resembles the proscenium arch of a stage. The viewer sees even the Cornaro men through this arch, placing them within the space of the stage—the realm of the performers. We become the audience of the Cornaro men as they take audience to Teresa's ecstasy. The Cornaro Chapel is a constructed play-within-a-play, the ultimate expression of the Baroque motto *theatrum mundi*.

The play-within-a-play concept was not far from Bernini's mind when he designed the Cornaro Chapel. One example of his use of this concept is the production mentioned by Domenico in which a fake audience mirrored the true audience on the opposite side of the stage. Our understanding of this production is limited, however, to secondhand descriptions. Of the approximately twenty plays Bernini authored in his lifetime, in fact, only one original text has survived. This untitled play, which has since come to be known as *The Impresario*, was first published by Cesare D'Onofrio in 1963 under the title *Fontana di Trevi*, a title initially used due to its discovery within the pages of a ledger documenting repairs completed on the famous Roman fountain. Twenty-five of the forty-four pages in the leger contain this play, which is assumed to be

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246 Hibbard, 128-130.

247 Hagerman-Young and Wilks, “The Theatrical Baroque,” 41. The authors here relate that “the play-within-a-play trope [was] favored in Baroque drama” and relate the concept to Baroque painting compositions.

248 Domenico, 134. See p. 52-53 above.

unfinished as it is followed by several blank pages. Near the end are a few notes signed by Bernini concerning the fountain repairs, and these are dated 13 August 1642 and 4 April 1643—during the tumultuous period of Bernini’s career and only a few years before the Cornaro commission.

The particularly interesting aspect of this comedy is that it is a play-within-a-play. The protagonist of the play, Graziano, is an impresario, a man that Beecher describes as “celebrated for his genius [and] a master craftsmen sought after by princes and flattered by courtiers.” The character is not unlike Bernini himself, and this was undoubtedly not a lost comparison on the seventeenth-century audience. As the plot of the three completed acts unfolds, a young man named Cinthio wants to win the favor of Graziano’s daughter and the approval of her father. His Neopolitan lackey Coviello, a devious young man, hatches a scheme for Cinthio to gain the money necessary to put on a display of affluence. The scheme involves convincing Graziano, through the use of forged orders from a prince for a performance, to stage a comedy. As the play is conceived and designed, Coviello receives money from Graziano’s rival, Alidoro, in exchange for the secrets of Graziano’s ingenuity of design. The scenes that follow revolve mostly around the production of this play—a play being created within Bernini’s play. This concept carries into some of the subplots, as well. For example, Bernini’s autobiographical equivalent, Graziano, falls for a housemaid, Rosetta.

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250 Beecher, “Gianlorenzo Bernini’s The Impresario,” n. 4. This document is in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and is part of three large collections of papers on Bernini. The Trevi document has been known to scholars for many years, but surprisingly was given no scholarly attention until D’Onofrio’s publication. It still has not satisfactorily been analyzed for its connection with the aesthetic properties of Bernini’s more theatrical sculptural works, such as the Cornaro Chapel.

The character Graziano then creates characters in his play based on himself and Rosetta. Graziano and Rosetta engage in a dialogue in which a marriage proposal is made and rejected. Both the proposal and the rejection, however, take place only within the two characters’ conversation about the fictitious characters Graziano has created to mirror them in his own play. It is, as Beecher observes, “an instance where art shapes life rather than life art.”

As The Impresario progresses, the audience becomes increasingly aware that the play is truly about its own conception. The imagination and skill of the artist is stressed in the creation of spectacular illusions that deceive the audience while reminding them of the artificiality thereof. Beecher and Ciavolella aptly state, “the play must be viewed both as an illusion of a reality and as an elaborate riddle in which the creation of the illusion itself plays a part.” The relationship between reality and imagination, rationality and faith, play out on the stage as the audience is reminded of their role as passive witnesses to an elaborate production. The audience is made aware of the fourth wall, the theoretical concept of theater that makes explicit reference to the imaginary barrier between the audience and stage, “a marker between a ‘real world’ and a performed virtuality.”

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252 Ibid., 238; Beecher and Ciavolella, Introduction to The Impresario, 8.

253 Beecher, “Gianlorenzo Bernini’s The Impresario,” 238.

254 Beecher and Ciavolella, Introduction to The Impresario, 12.

The notions that arise in the *theatrum mundi* concept and the resulting Baroque taste for the play-within-a-play can convincingly be applied to the design of the Cornaro Chapel. The imaginary barrier between stage and audience that exists in theater provides the barrier necessary in maintaining emotional distance between the viewer and the controversial subject of the chapel’s decoration. Of *The Impresario*, Beecher and Ciavolella explain, “The emphasis is no longer upon story but upon wit, the play’s indwelling idea seeking recognition in the audience’s intellect rather than its feeling.” The same could be said of the Cornaro Chapel. By placing Teresa on a stage within a theater setting, emotional distance is automatically built in to the viewer’s experience. The viewers do not witness directly the mystical moments of Teresa’s life and death, they witness these events being performed for an audience of the Cornaro Cardinals. The interaction between Teresa and her audience is a primary emphasis of the overall message being communicated to the viewer of this play-within-a-play. Michael Call reached a similar conclusion, stating: “the viewer is invited to participate in the vision but also simultaneously warned against getting too close, of being drawn in, because of the event’s sacredness as well as its danger.”

As the audience of Bernini’s theater, the viewer observes, rather than participates in, the narrative that unfolds. As such, one common interpretation of Bernini’s intended viewer response must be addressed. This interpretation is recounted by Call when he describes the activities of the Cornaro portraits in the

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256 Ibid., 21.

257 Call, 38.
The chapel: “Their gazes survey the audience as well as the altarpiece, projecting onto the audience their reactions to the event and providing the cues to follow. The chapel’s benefactor, Cardinal Federico, watches to see if we are imitating their example.”

According to this interpretation, the Cornaro portraits are intended to encourage the viewer to discuss, debate, and read about the scene they are witnessing. This would in effect draw the viewer into the realm of the performers, the Cornaro men, in active participation in the production. This has to be far from the original intent. I suggest that Bernini intended quite the opposite response from the viewer—a highly controlled response more akin to the audience of a theater production. In light of the religious atmosphere of the Counter-Reformation, encouraging the seventeenth-century viewer to discuss and analyze a scene of mystical experience would have been far from Bernini’s and Federico’s intentions. In 1563, the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) dictated that art should evoke a response of piety, not one that would elicit a personal interpretation of subject matter through discussion and study.

Interpretation of scripture and religious experience was left to Church officials, not to individuals. This belief was solidified in a papal bull of 1521 that labeled Martin Luther’s teachings as heretical, teachings including the individual’s right to interpret scriptures for themselves.

The study and interpretation of Teresa’s mystical experience by men of the Church is precisely what Bernini depicted through the activity of the Cornaro

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258 Ibid.
259 Mormando, 165.
260 Carmody and Carmody, 61.
men. As the narrative of Bernini’s theater unfolds, seven of the eight men are actively participating in the production. These men either read about or appear to be discussing the scene before them. These are the Cardinals of the family line—men of the faith. The one Cornaro that is not actively participating is Giovanni, the former Venetian Doge and sole secular leader among the group. The stylistic contrast between the Cardinals and Doge Giovanni has escaped scholarly attention thus far, but may provide significant insight into the message Bernini was attempting to deliver. As opposed to the treatment of a full portrait bust, only the head of this secular leader appears in the far corner of the left niche. Treated as such, the doge appears to be retreating from the scene—maintaining his view of Teresa but backing away from the event that the Cardinals are so actively engaged in witnessing. A bozzetto of this niche depicts the doge as further detached from the scene (Figure 57). Here, the doge is placed behind the three cardinals, in low relief, facing away from the altarpiece. Compared to the bozzetto, the final design gave the doge more prominence, as may have been requested by Federico who wanted to honor his father in this chapel, but Bernini’s design still succeeded in keeping the secular leader relegated to a corner and minimally treated. The former Doge is also not depicted as actively reading or discussing the scene before him. He is like the viewer: He observes the scene, but is removed from the responsibility of assessing the doctrinal validity of Teresa’s ecstasy. In this context, the viewer is

261 Ivan Gaskell and Henry Lie, “Sketches in Clay for Projects by Gian Lorenzo Bernini: Theoretical, Technical, and Case Studies, Harvard University Art Museum’s Bulletin 6, no. 3 [Spring, 1999], 62; Wittkower, 217. Wittkower makes reference to this bozzetto, but does not analyze it formally in terms of the ideas Bernini was working out as he designed the space.
educated in Counter-Reformation politics regarding theological doctrine, as well as the role of visual art in portraying properly sanctioned themes within the confines of a religious institution.

CONCLUSION

Rarely has the theatricality of Bernini’s Cornaro Chapel gone unmentioned in scholarship. The niches containing the portrait busts of the Cornaro men immediately bring to mind the prominent box-seats of Baroque theaters. Teresa’s tabernacle emerges from the rear wall and confines her to a framed space reminiscent of a stage, where, through carefully implemented visual cues, she performs the canonical moments and experiences of her life and death beneath a controlled, natural spotlight. To these clear and established theatrical references, I add that Bernini’s design of the space, when seen as a whole from the controlled vantage point in the center of the nave beneath the dome, closely follows the standard vertical hierarchy that existed in many Renaissance and Baroque era stage designs. Scholarship thus far, however, has not gone beyond the visual references to theater that exist in the Cornaro Chapel to question why Bernini chose to implement them into his design. I suggest that these references were more than just aesthetic choices—they were intended as an important aspect of the overall message being communicated to the viewer. Bernini’s careful arrangement of media into a stage containing a performance in the Cornaro Chapel is intended to physically guide the viewer’s approach to the

262 See pp. 56-57.
space, while also guiding the intellectual and emotional response to the theme of the Chapel’s decoration.

I argue that Bernini’s Cornaro Chapel was intentionally designed as a play-within-a-play. This theatrical device was popular among seventeenth-century playwrights and audiences, and one with which Bernini had experience, especially through his play *The Impresario*, written and left unfinished during the same tumultuous period of his career in which Federico Cornaro commissioned his funerary chapel. The play-within-a-play device, as in the case of *The Impresario*, invites the audience to see not only the spectacle of a theater performance, but the creation processes behind theater performances. It invites the viewer behind the scenes, where the imagination and creativity of producers, writers, and set designers can be observed. The creative device also focuses the attention of the audience on the interaction that takes place between audience and performance, as the real audience sees a performed audience reacting to the play-within-a-play. This interaction is an important aspect of the theme. The audience of a play-within-a-play sees the creative efforts of the producer and performers, in which they try to inspire specific reactions from the audience through various effects and dialogue, and these reactions, too, are seen in the fictional audience.

The play-within-a-play was a clever device for Bernini to have utilized in the design of the Cornaro Chapel. The theme presented to the viewer of this chapel was one that carried with it a recent history of controversy and debate. Bernini needed to present a deeply and sexually charged account of Teresa’s
mystical experiences—not the kind of experiences that would be encouraged by the Church for people to desire or seek after. The post-Tridentine Roman Church walked a fine line between acceptance and condemnation of mystical theology. The mental prayer and supernatural occurrences associated with its practitioners had the potential to either confirm God’s divine interaction with the faithful in the Roman Church, or to inspire protest and dissent against the rigid orthodoxy and structure inherent in the Catholic faith. Earlier in Teresa’s century, Martin Luther had instilled in Church leaders a realization that religious dissent, even that which is posed by a single monk from Wittenburg, could elevate to an uncontrollable degree throughout all of Christendom if ignored or unnoticed. While not a mystic himself, Luther authored his 95 Theses and sparked the fires of the Protestant faith while simultaneously editing a copy of a medieval mystical treatise, the Theologia Deutsch. This fact was not lost on Church officials. During Teresa’s age and after, the Church was ever watchful of the autonomy and private divine communication sought after by those practicing and spreading the beliefs of Christian mysticism, as these practices verged on the heresy of Protestantism.

Bernini’s design for the Cornaro Chapel took these issues into account. In the Cornaro Chapel, Teresa’s visions, levitations, ecstasies, and death unfold as acts in a play. Her play, however, is not being presented directly to us, but to an audience of eight prominent members of the Cornaro family. The reactions of these men to what they are seeing is a vital aspect of Bernini’s controlled message to the viewer of the chapel. Seven of these figures, including the patron, were Cardinals, men of the Church, and these men actively engage with
the performance they are witnessing through discussion and reading. One figure, however, was stylistically treated quite differently than the other seven, both in the *bozzetto* study and in the final design. This fact is worthy of analysis, and clues the viewer in to the controlled message Bernini was attempting to communicate. Doge Giovanni, the only secular member of the family, appears to be backing away from the scene. We see only his face as he nearly disappears behind the Cardinals that are treated in full busts. As the only secular leader among this group, he seems to step back from the controversial subject matter, relinquishing responsibility in assessing the validity of the scene. Just as the audience of Bernini’s *Impresario* would have witnessed the creation of a play within Bernini’s play, at the Cornaro Chapel we witness the creation of a canonized saint within the confines of the Church’s sanctioned system of doctrinal validation. We are reminded that such validation does not come from us, or from secular authorities, but from the upper echelons of Church hierarchy.

As such, the Cornaro Chapel does not negate the questions surrounding mysticism and its potential dangers, it simply presents them as objects of discussion and debate within the parameters of the Church. It both honors and carefully examines the mystical experience. We stand back and watch as Cardinals of the Roman Church study, discuss, and interpret a mystical and potentially dangerous experience. That play is then handed to us as a Church-sanctioned example of mystical union with God. Both the viewer’s experience and understanding of this miracle is controlled by Bernini’s structuring of the chapel space. It is the Church that is in charge of this production.
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Figure 25. Detail of vault decoration (left), Cornaro Chapel. Stucco. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, http://www.artstor.org (accessed June 10, 2012).
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Figure 29. Detail of vault decoration (left), Cornaro Chapel. Stucco. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, http://www.artstor.org (accessed June 10, 2012).
Figure 34. View of south exterior wall, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. Reproduced from Lavin, vol. 2, figure 142.
Figure 35. Exterior view of window chamber, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. Reproduced from Lavin, vol. 2, figure 144.
Figure 36. Interior view of window chamber, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. Reproduced from Lavin, vol. 2, figure 146.
Figure 37. Detail of the window chamber above the Ecstasy of St. Teresa, Cornaro Chapel. Photograph by Adam Ladd, 2010.
Figure 42. Detail of the *Last Supper* (altarpiece frontal), Cornaro Chapel. Gilded bronze, lapis lazuli. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, http://www.artstor.org (accessed June 10, 2012).
Figure 44. Detail of the face of Teresa in the Ecstasy of St. Teresa, Cornaro Chapel. Marble. Reproduced from Lavin, vol. 2, figure 169.
Figure 45. Detail of the left foot of Teresa in the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, Cornaro Chapel. Marble. Reproduced from Lavin, vol. 2, figure 172.
Figure 46. Portraits of Cardinal Marco (left) and Doge Giovanni (right), left niche of the Cornaro Chapel. Marble. Reproduced from ArtStor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed June 10, 2012).
Figure 50. Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, vestibule, Palazzo Farnese, Rome. 1534. Reproduced from Lavin, vol. 2, figure 214.
Figure 53. View of the Cornaro Chapel from the direction of the church entrance. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, http://www.artstor.org (accessed June 18, 2012).
Figure 56. Andrea Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi, ground plan of the Teatro Olimpico showing stage doors used for perspective scenery, 1584. Reproduced from ArtStor, http://www.artstor.org (accessed June 18, 2012).
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