

WORKS DONE ON THE FACADE OF THE BASILICA OF SAINT PETER

The construction of Saint Peter's Church lasted through the 1500s. Meanwhile, a part of the ancient early-Christian and medieval basilica remained, fronted by a vast, four-sided portico and different buildings with facades looking onto the parvis. It wasn't until the beginning of the 1600s that Pope Paul V (Borghese, 1605-1621), opposing those who wanted to complete the central installation and preserve the remaining part of the ancient basilica, initiated the last stage of work by extending the centric body begun by Donato Bramante (1444-1514) and completed fittingly by Michelangelo's dome, to include the entire sacred area of the ancient basilica and, in the end, facing onto the city of Rome with a majestic, stately facade. This delicate and difficult task was placed in the hands of Carlo Maderno (1580-1630), winner of a competition by invitation called by the Pope in 1606.

The façade is made up of a gigantic series of eight central columns with pilasters to the sides, on which are inscribed the smaller orders that frame the windows of the



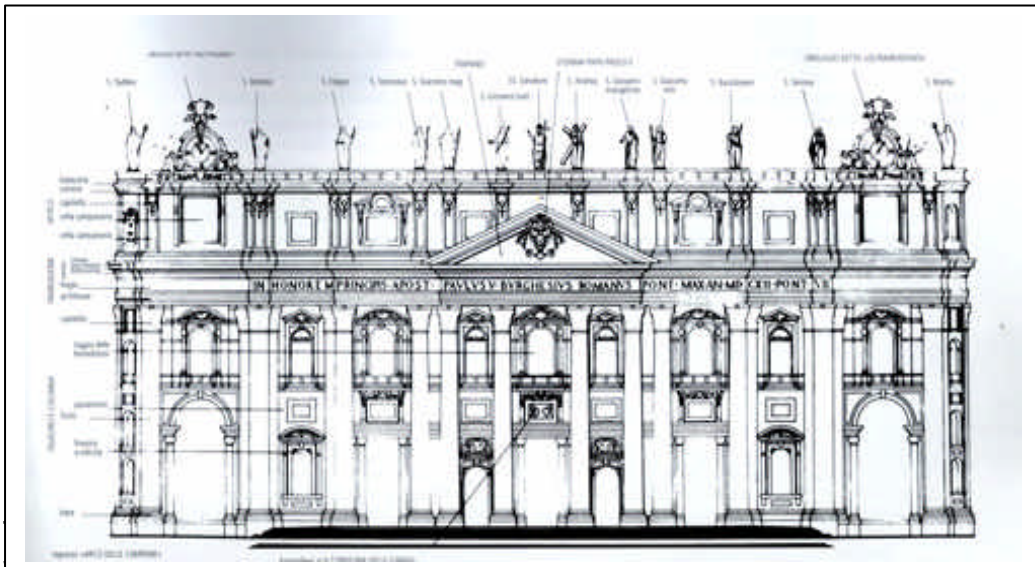
atrium and the loggia above it. Four central columns support the tympanum and lead back to the Temple image, already belonging to the 16th-century iconographic system, that established that Saint Peter's Church as the most important temple in Christianity. The attic dominates the architectural order and takes up Michelangelo's coping strip that encircles the 16th-century construction creating a solemn base to the dome. The imposing building mass is lightened by a subtle chiaroscuro effect caused by the chromatic vibration inherent in the slight, two-color

effect between the background and the elements of architectural order. Also contributing to this effect is the alternation of the fore and back planes progressively moving backward from the center towards the sides and, in the loggia windows, the alternation of balconies which protrude with balconies that are aligned with the background. When construction of the monumental façade was finished, the architect Carlo Maderno engraved the date of 1612, as an everlasting memory of the giant building's completion. In truth, the project was not quite finished. Still missing were several of the statues of the attic's coping, the bas-relief of the Loggia of Blessings portraying the donation of the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter, by Ambrogio Buonvicino (1557-1622), and the lateral bell-towers to be designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) in 1613. The towers were never made because their weight would have been too much of a burden for the ground beneath the basilica to bear; in their place we now see the two large clocks designed by Giuseppe Valadier (1762-1839) in 1789.

From the time of its completion the task of taking care of the facade has remained within the scope of the Fabbrica di San Pietro's regular maintenance program. However; four hundred years later, the facade's state of deterioration has noticeably reached the point of needing a timely and more energetic intervention for its preservation. The lack of the extra means necessary to complete the vast and demanding work schedule forced the daunting enterprise to be postponed until the Order of the Knights of Columbus offered the Holy Father John Paul II, on the 40th anniversary of His Holiness's sacerdocy and on the 8th anniversary of his Ministry as Universal Pastor of the Church, the amount necessary to complete the project.

The work was completed in twenty months, from April 1985 to November 1986. It was led by Giuseppe Zander (1920-1990) and, under the guidance of three architects and one assistant,

enlisted the company and workers from the Fabbrica: electricians, blacksmiths, carpenters, plumbers, laborers, mosaicists, masons, painters, "pontaroli" (scaffolders), stone-cutters, for a total of seventy "sanpietrini" who are occupied with the regular maintenance of Saint Peter's on a daily basis and, therefore, familiar with the peculiarities and problems of the giant Fabbrica. The intervention was carried out with respect for the historical-aesthetic value of the monument and the elements making it up, with an awareness that the job was taking place in the present and therefore was aimed to achieve the best «present state of the ancient material» and not a restoration of an image that has been lost over the centuries. The cleaning was done within the scope of preserving the material authenticity of the architectural work with carefully measured actions, to eliminate evidence and causes of deterioration, but at the same time respectful of the patinas and the changes in the material, recognized as marks of the natural aging of an architectural work.



The special maintenance work consisted of cleaning, reinforcing and protecting the entire facade (approximately 10,500 square meters), with special attention paid to the delicate problems of deterioration existing in several architectural and sculptural elements.

were necessary, as were the substitution of numerous antique iron cramps with brass cramps, and the restoration of the mosaic inscription located on the frieze. Specific interventions were carried out on the two architectural groups of the clocks "Oltromontano" and "All'italiana" on either side of the facade, on the eight imposing central columns in travertine stone, on the two cornices and the baluster of the coping, on the five entrance gates to the atrium of the basilica, on certain sculptural elements, the tiaras placed above the 18th century clocks, Buonvicino's high relief, the thirteen statues of the attic coping, and on the lightning rod system.