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Pilgrimage Within the Orvieto Cathedral:

How Direction and Movement of Structure and Ornament Provide a Guide to Catholicism

Direction, by its very notion, leads you to a destination. Direction implies a journey, from a sometimes undefined starting point to a definite end. This notion occurs in the instance of pilgrimage, as one embarks on a journey toward God. Pilgrimage involves a journey to a place you know exists, but that you do not experience until the completion of the journey; the journey of pilgrimage somehow changes us, even when we do not explicitly know we are on pilgrimage. The Cathedral of Orvieto encapsulates guidance for a pilgrimage, inherent in both its structure and design. The architectural layout, in conjunction with scenes depicting Church history, provide a model for a Catholic life, thus making the cathedral itself a didactic example of the ideal path that Catholics should take, while also depicting what could happen to you if you stray from this path. The structure and ornament of the Cathedral of Orvieto, specifically Luca Signorelli’s eschatological frescos in the Capella Nuova, serve as a visual guide to religious teachings, informing you of the Church’s history and encouraging you to choose a life aimed at

communion with God.

On November 13, 1290, Pope Nicholas IV laid the cornerstone of what would become the Cathedral of Orvieto. Dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, the cathedral was meant to be as big and noble as, and in the style of, the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (Rosatelli 35). While Santa Maria Maggiore is built in a more classical Roman style, in order to connect the imperial past to the Christian present and future, the Cathedral of Orvieto does not follow this

form. Unlike many of the churches, cathedrals, and basilicas in Rome, the Cathedral of Orvieto has a Gothic form, stretching up to be nearer to the heavens. Specifically, this cathedral follows the Sienese Gothic style, with characteristic alternating white and gray stripes.

Direction guides you from the first moment you come upon the Cathedral of Orvieto (Figure 1). The bands of white travertine and deep gray basalt stones, which remind a contemporary audience of a prison uniform, do anything but contain you; the horizontal strips act as a guide, leading you around the structure, no matter where you stand. Additionally, the verticality of the cathedral, emphasized through its facade, clearly establishes the front of the Cathedral. These dimensions perform the first act of pilgrimage by introducing you to the religious. You must be of and around the secular in order to encounter and the religious; the guidance from the secular life to the boundary of the religious creates the possibility for journey and transformation.

The monumental portal that marks this transformation is the facade of the Cathedral. Mosaics and sculptures inform visitors of the life of Mary and the life of Jesus, and they also reference the Gospel writers, various saints that have significance in Orvieto, and more.1 The

four pillars of the doorways to the Cathedral set up the perfect entranceway by laying out Church history. Here, before you can even enter, the function of the doorway informs its form and decoration; the doorway allows entry to those who seek to follow God. This is articulated in the decoration of the pillars. The leftmost pillar tells the story of the creation of the universe, the second pillar represents Abrahams vision, while the third shows Jacob’s vision that chronicles the

1 See Rosatelli’s diagrams on pp. 28-9 of *The Cathedral of Orvieto*.

life of Jesus, and the final pillar exhibits the Last Judgement.2 The doorway provides a brief

summary and refresher of Church history, preparing one to meaningfully participate in and understand the larger journey to God throughout the Cathedral.

After having passed through the portals, the interior encourages you to consider how architecture influences horizontal and vertical time in pilgrimage, and in eschatology, “because the time up to death is the vessel of salvation time” (Balthasar 38).3 “In order to be a history of

salvation, time must have its limits and must move unrepeatably in a single direction” (Daley 219). Horizontal time represents this limited, finite time. Our earthly lives exist in horizontal time, so horizontal time ends when we die. What we do in horizontal time has lasting effects, even when we depart from this life, but we cannot work to change what we have done once we die. Thus, what we do in our earthly, horizontal time, is fixed. Inversely, vertical time endures forever, starting when we are born:

“The vertical ‘today’ is suspended in and over the horizontal ‘now;’ it cannot be anchored in it as something future which is at hand (for horizontal time passes away and cannot be anchored) nor can it be regarded as something timelessly suspended above it, for the ‘future of God’ is not a timeless idea, but an event of divine freedom breaking

in” (Balthasar 35).

Through vertical time, we have the liberty to move closer to or further from God; vertical time is a direct engagement of our relationship with God. “The extended structure of time can only be dissolved vertically, by being re-enfolded in the freedom of transcending love….God himself is

2 Rosatelli provides accessible diagrams of these pillars in *The Cathedral of Orvieto*, pp. 19, 21, 23, and 25.

3 “In a word, eschatology ‘applies’ a conviction about the ultimate character of reality, in hope, to that unknown which lies ahead” (Daley 3).

this love…it is for man to respond to this love in an irrevocable act of choice (19). Thus, vertical time allows us to improve our relationship with God from the moment we are born, throughout horizontal time, and in the next world until the Last Judgement.4 Because vertical time is not

limited to our corporeal lives, we can choose God even if we have passed from this world and rejected him in horizontal time.

Gothic architecture grants both vertical and horizontal dimensions to a cathedral. As it stretches up toward the sky in an attempt to meet the heavens, the cathedral exhibits vertical time. Starting in the outside world, we pass through the doorway to enter a sacred space and eventually, led by repetitive columns (Figure 2), process closer and closer to the altar and tabernacle that houses Jesus as the Eucharist.5 The long nave provides a space to pass along

through horizontal time.6 The interior opens “the heart of the faithful” to “gently invite him to

enter the tabernacle of the Lord” (Rosatelli 33). In a horizontal way, we use our bodies to approach God physically. “Ascending movement conditions all,” whether it be when “our eye is led upward [to] the heavenly hierarchies” by “the upward-looking and pointing figures” in the vaults, or as we process down the nave to the tabernacle (Riess 34).

In this part of the church, the transept overlaps the nave to produce a cross shape. If one looks at the cross shape, one would probably translate the previously horizontal nave to become

4 “It is impossible to apply to the kingdom and the Church the idea of a temporal evolution because God’s kingdom is everlasting” (Balthasar 38).

5 The Roman remnants of treating the basilica as a place of business contribute to the gradation of normal to sacred. Romans would conduct their business and markets in the back of a the basilica, and a screen would sometimes separate this space from the part of the church used for holy ceremonies. We see this gradation today in that the further in you go to a cathedral, the closer you are to the holiest place, the altar and tabernacle.

6 The repeating paired columns, equally spaced, guide you down the nave. The continuity of these columns, from the entrance to the altar, frames the altar as the destination and also creates a sense of repetitive incantation. While these columns are not explicitly Ionic, they borrow the function of procession and guidance from this order.

the vertical axis, and thus the transepts become horizontal and another space to physically approach God. Reorienting the axes of the church also reorients your experience of spiritual journey while in the space.

When the Cathedral is transformed into a cross, and the horizontal path of the nave becomes the vertical and the transepts become the arms, the Chapel of the Eucharistic Mystery and the Chapel of the Madonna di San Brizio, or the Capella Nuova, become avenues for horizontal procession. Interestingly, one of two spaces to explore in this situation is a chapel that explores the physicality of Christ as bread and wine are transformed to become His body and blood; the other is a space that prompts meditation about discipleship, dangers of following the anti-Christ, the end of time, resurrection of souls, heaven, hell, revelation, and Jesus as Pantocrator. Considering the physicality of Jesus through the Eucharist in the Chapel of the Eucharistic Mystery inspires reflection on the other arm of the transept, about your corporeal relationship with God and then the relationship you have as your soul endures after life on earth.

The Chapel of the Eucharistic Mystery, also known as the Chapel of the Corporal, has its origins in the individual pilgrimage of the 13th century Bohemian priest, Pietro da Praga. Pietro set out to Rome in 1263 because he felt “anguished by the doubt about the actual presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion” and sought “to be freed from such a doubt” (Rosatelli 75). Upon saying mass at Santa Cristina in Bolsena on his way home, “the Host miraculously turned into meat in his trampling fingers, dropping red blood which colored the Corporal, the purifiers and a number of altar stones” (Rosatelli 75). Pope Urban IV called for the Corporal linen to be taken to Orvieto, where roughly 30 years later, in 1290, construction began on the Cathedral,

which included a chapel for this Eucharist Mystery.7 This Chapel and the reliquary exhibit many

scenes of both the reception of communion and the Miracle of Bolsena.8 That these scenes are

represented offers support for the high reverence with which the Eucharist is regarded; it embodies the hallmark of the faith, that God became human to die for our sins in order to save us. Eucharist offers “a share in the very life and mind of the risen Jesus” and becomes a promise “of a final salvation that still [lays] ahead, beyond death and the collapse of human history” (Daley 4).

An encounter with the Eucharist, the statement that Christ died for us, reminds us of the body of the Church, a communion with all members. The Church depends on community, and you must embrace the social network of the Church to be fully a part of it. We see this play out through horizontal time, as

“the truth of my existence before God is related to the shape of that existence as lived among others. There is no ‘I’ without including the impact my life as made upon others… Even at the moment of my death the reality of my ‘I’ is not yet complete, since the impact of my life continues to extend in the lives of those with whom I have been in relation, whether I have been fully conscious of these relations or not” (Robinette 167-8).

This idea is related in scripture:

7 The Eucharistic Miracle prompted the beginning of the Feast of Corpus Christi, also known as Corpus Domini. This includes a procession in celebration of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. “On August 11th, 1264, from Orvieto, by means of the *Transiturus de Mundo* Bull, [Pope Urbano IV] languid the new precept to the world: every Thursday following the eighth week of Pentecost, a feast of extraordinary solemnity would be celebrated in honor of the Lord’s Body and Blood” (Rosaletti 77).

8 The reliquary that housed, until 1980, the relic of the Corporal, somewhat mimics the facade of the Cathedral as it is divided vertically into three sections, with the middle section extending the highest. See Rosaletti 83.

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, through many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body…and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-3).

The Eucharist joins us all in the community of Christ. By participating in this sacrament, we join in the community and engage in behavior that will lead us to heaven. Heaven represents fulfillment in embracing communion with others, while hell is the exact antithesis – it is a self- willed rejection of God, leading to isolation. We depend on community and partaking in the body of the Church to live and thrive with Christ.

Because our faith and fate depend on community, it appears to be more than just coincidence that the Chapel of the Corporal and the Capella Nuova anchor each side of the transept. While their positions seem like a confrontational opposition, I claim that the arrangement enhances the individual effects of the two chapels. “The Eucharist is the supreme eschatological sacrament, an act of mediation on the part of the church between this world and the next” (Riess 16).

The end of this world and the entrance into the next is considered through Luca Signorelli’s scenes of the Last Judgement in the Capella Nuova, dedicated to the Assumption of Mary.9 Signorelli works with the existing architecture to, in the upper walls and lunettes, take

viewers through the progression of the Last Judgement and considers the end outcomes. The architectural “‘give’ is turned to advantage” as Signorelli divided his narrative in two sections.

9 This expansive chapel has much to explore. In this paper, I will only focus on the scenes of the End of the World and the Last Judgement. While Signorelli’s bottom frescos of contemporary thinkers (Ovid, Horace, Lucan, Orpheus Homer, Virgil, et al.) adds meaning to the rest of the frescos, I do not presently have enough knowledge of Dante to treat them as well as I would like to. Perhaps another iteration of this paper will take these panels into consideration. Likewise, the vaults of the roof includes part of the original program by Fra Angelico (Christ the Pantocrator and the Prophets), and the rest (the Apostles, signs indicating the Last Judgement, Martyrs, Patricians, Doctors, and Virgins) were completed by Signorelli. I will mention Christ the Pantocrator, but will leave the rest for another paper.

The northern half projects events of the final days of human history, from the Rule of Antichrist, through the End of the World, and to the Resurrection of the Dead. The southern half is further divided in half at the altar. The left chamber depicts the Coronation of the Elect and flows into the Elect Entering Heaven on the left side of the altar, and the right side of the altar leads the Damned Entering Hell downwards to the right chamber, which gives a comprehensive view of The Damned (Figures 3 and 4**)**.10 Though this narrative seems to flow circularly, the shape in which we consider time in our quotidian lives, I will argue that the architecture, and the murals that it influences, work together to linearly strengthen the message and example of horizontal and vertical time in the Capella Nuova.

In the aforementioned analysis of the orientation of the Cathedral as representing horizontal and vertical time, I established that the transepts are avenues through which to explore horizontal time. The Capella Nuova anchors the right side of this axis, and upon reaching this chapel, the murals framing the altar inform you that this chapel explores the Last Judgement. However, you can only begin this narrative journey when inside the chapel, starting with the leftmost mural at the east, the Rule of Antichrist (Figure 4). While not the first place your eye goes, it is important to note that Signorelli included himself and his producing painter of this chapel, Fra Angelico, in the bottom left corner because it places both secular and religious figures into the scene, thus inviting you to imagine yourself in the following scenes.11 Additionally, these “individuals who could not in truth have known each other” across earthly

10 I will refer to Signorelli’s frescos by the names given in this diagram.

11 Injecting contemporary life into this work allowed the viewer to better imagine himself going through this journey. Other familiar figures – though not exclusively contemporary – are in the work, such as Dante, Horace, Homer, Virgil, and Ovid in the lower panels. Their situation vertically lifts the secular to consider the religious above.

time, exemplify that all persons throughout space and time will partake in the Last Judgement; we are all called to this moment as believers in Christ, as we conclude our experience of corporeal, horizontal time, but continue our relationship with God through everlasting vertical time.

The Rule of the Antichrist has a circular form of itself, with a barren center. Starting in the top right, “the off-center placement of the [Temple of Solomon] indicates the disharmony and imbalance of Antichrist’s dominion;” it “opposes the true church,” just as the Antichrist opposes Jesus Christ (Riess 44). In a clockwise direction, Satan and the Antichrist form one body as the former puppets the latter at the bottom of the mural.12 Despite the crowds around him and the

prideful symbol of the horse on which the pair stand, their anchoring in the bottom level of the painting underscores the position in which they belong, that is, away from the high heavens. In contrast, and as your eye continues upwards to the left side of the panel, Saint Michael, the protector of God’s kingdom, destructively blasts the Antichrist with a sword from the high heavens, bringing forth fiery rain; “the wrath of God renders the legions of Antichrist impotent” as the rays pierce through the Antichrist and disseminate to his followers (Riess 42). The followers scurry in pain to resist the catastrophic charge, leading the viewer leftwards to the End of the World (Figure 5).

The architecture on which this fresco appears perfectly aligns with its intent to bridge the Antichrist scene to the Resurrection of the Dead. In reading this painting, your eyes fix on the “Old Testament seer,” thought to be “David, whose Psalms were often cited by Christian theologians as an antecedent to, and evidence for, their own predictions concerning the end of the

12 James’ essay in *Artibus et Historiae* mentions that the colors of the pair cloak them as Christ, but in dissonant colors, showing the false imitation of Christ (134).

world and Last Judgement” (Riess 48). His upward pointing hand directs attention to signs of the end of times, such as a flood and collapsing buildings, which come from Jerome’s prophecies (Riess 50). The vertical movement, necessary to understand the scene, consequentially exhibits how the conclusion of horizontal time will happen; vertical time will outlive horizontal time.

Before moving on to the rest of the scene, I find it noteworthy to consider that five cherubs act as a pseudo-acroterion of this arch. They present a disc with a cross that holds the

monogram OPSM, referencing the Opera di Santa Maria.13 This disc brings to mind both a

cruciform halo and the Eucharistic host14. At this point, attention should be refocused on the

Chapel of the Corporal at the other end of the horizontal axis. This moment brings the sacrament of the Eucharist into the forefront of your mind, causing you to remember Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice for our salvation, as well as the act of communion, during which all members of the Church accept this rite and join in Christ’s body during the Mass. Participating in the Eucharist during horizontal time lifts one closer to God throughout vertical time.

That the archway must descend plays into the storytelling of the Last Judgement is a happy coincidence, as it allows the depiction of the heavenly onslaught to take a destructive and negative image. Again, angels blast out conflagrations to destroy impish operators of Satan, establishing “a mood of frenzied stridency in this explosive counterpoint to the depiction of prophetic pronouncement on the opposed side of the arch” (Riess 52). These blasts, with their negative slopes, seem to propel mankind away from the heavens. However, they actually seek

13 Remember that Pope Nicholas IV wanted this Cathedral to be as great as that of the papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, and that the Cathedral is dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, mother of God (Cabezas 1).

14 The cruciform halo is traditionally used to mark members of the trinity, namely Jesus. While Mary is not of the trinity, I find the allusion here, intended or not, considerable. Mary is the mother of God, and therefore takes part in his incarnation. His incarnation is expressed to us and celebrated in the Eucharistic bread, to which I argue this disc draws attention. In a similar route, the cruciform halo reminds of the host, which indeed does represent a member of the trinity.

refuge by leaving this world, “this foretaste of hell” (Riess 52).15 In a desire to escape this

expulsion, they flee to the left side of the arch, toward the Resurrection of the Dead.

Though the Resurrection of the Dead (Figure 6) horizontally follows the End of the World scene, it now represents time exclusively apart from the horizontal dimension; brought to a life beyond earth, humans can only adjust their relationship with God through vertical time. Signorelli depicts verticality throughout all levels of this fresco. Though the verticality is summoned top-down, as angels sound the trumpets, the image also ascends bottom-up as the trumpets call the dead upwards to new life.16 Bodies rise from the dust, a complement of Genesis

3:19, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”17 Having just faced the Chapel of

the Corporal, the Eucharist is on your mind, enhancing this Resurrection image in conjunction with the scripture; this didactic sends an invitation to the viewer that you should partake in the Eucharist if you seek salvation and a new life with God, again supporting an exercise of vertical time within horizontal time.

Emerging from the dust with new life, people push themselves out of the ground in their new bodies. The scene follows Ezekiel’s vision: “bones came together….I saw the sinews and the flesh come upon them, and the skin cover them, but there was no spirit in them” (37:7-8).

15 A reference to motherly protection, which Mary provides to all as the Mother of the Church, occurs when two mothers hold tight to their children as they encounter the heavenly onslaught, a scene often noted in scriptural accounts of the end of time (Riess 52). Mary, represented here as mothers, thus has a role in protectively ushering us toward the new world, also seen in her act of delivering Jesus, who brings is to this new world, into our existing world that we experience in horizontal time.

16 “For the Lord Himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from the heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thes 4:16).

17 “Signorelli has purposely left out the traditional themes. Instead of the tombs opened up by the bodies coming out of them and taking their primitive aspects, he has created the story on a ground completely lacking any figurative element” (*The Cathedral of Orvieto* 28).

Skeletons become erect bodies; “groups of living beings recognize each other, they embrace, they sing hymns to life, they aspire to the sky where their turn their eyes and stretch their arms, with the attitude of those who hope…They are waiting for Christ” (Rosatelli 114).

Emotions of elation in the new life occupy foreground. The bent figure of the left foreground is an exception to both verticality and vivaciousness. He seems to lack corporeality, functioning sans “the guidance of soul or intellect” (Riess 54). God seems to have not informed him with the breath of life described in Genesis 2:7. The figure bends upon himself, and his gaze focuses on his own left arm and leg, isolated from the rejoicing community.18 Though he is being

resurrected, it seems that he might have rejected the community of the Church at some point. This divergence offers a contrast to the overall upward motion of the panel.

The scene continues as you follow the heavenly-oriented gaze of the resurrected figures. In the liminal space between the resurrected and the angels and cherubs, the background color shifts from blue to gold, representing the end of horizontal time on earth, and the perpetuation of vertical and divine time. Again, your eye lands on the twice-life-sized pair of Archangels with expansive, protecting wings. Their trumpets not only sound the resurrection, but they also don the banner of the Cross of the Resurrection, the cross that Jesus carried as he rose from the dead, in defeat of death (Riess 58). This banner connects to the trumpets at the same latitude as the archangels' waists and the stark division of blue and gold skies. It is also at this point that the golden stars of heaven that burst from the apex of the scene fade away; I take this alignment to show that the Cross of the Resurrection and the trumpets, in conjunction, transform the illusion

18 The left side has historical sinister connotations, stemming from the Latin *sinister*, meaning left, or, in the context of omens, unfavorable and unlucky. I wonder, then, why the narrative flows from right to left.

in heaven into audible and visually tangible symbols that capture and lead the resurrected from their deaths. The Resurrection of the Dead completes the first half of Signorelli’s overall agenda.

The southern section of Signorelli’s frescos depict the Last Judgement. Here, the Coronation of the Elect leads to the Elect Entering Heaven on the left, and the Damned Entering Hell on the other side of the arch above the altar, leads to a scene of the Damned. This arrangement fulfills the events of the northern half of the Chapel. The two scenes split the altar in half, directly below the image of Christ as Pantocrator, who judges and sorts from above.

In the Damned Entering Hell (Figure 7a), the golden stars of heaven encompass the archangels, one of whom is Michael, guarding heaven from any hell-bound figures who might try to escape. The golden stars cease at the archangels’ legs, before a white liminal boundary,

perhaps suggesting an intermediary purgatory.19 The small figures’ bodies are pulled in all

directions about the red landscape, swirling around Charon’s boat, and a devil with a white flag attempts to lead them down to hell. Without one clear directional path, the route of the hell- bound is chaotic and disorderly. “The chaos of the early city and the city of hell are one and the same for Signorelli” (Riess 60). There is no communion and harmony in the approach to hell, much less in the actual realm.

Demons that suffocate, manipulate, twist, and puppeteer the hell-bound spill over from the rightmost interaction of a demon and human in the Damned Entering Hell image, to the fresco of the Damned (Figure 8). Again, bodily contortion and demonic manipulation dominates the entirely frenzied and unorganized event. Order tries to repair the scene at the top, again

19 There is no depiction of purgatory, and since this barren scene is between heaven and hell, I think it could represent purgatory. Additionally, that the archangels’ legs are in the area, and that the landscape of hell touches the borders, these details could suggest the possibility of turning to or away from God in purgatory.

nodding to the idea that verticality expresses order and a closeness to God and harmony — the field of gold stars is drawn back to only the uppermost region of the fresco — but it does not work. The archangels and rebellious angels occupy the space; the archangels in armor have a firm and rigid stance that evokes authority and order, while the rebellious ones continue contortion and dart around, engaged in disarray.

Below, emphasizing the instruction not to aspire to such a life, Signorelli situates the inferno itself. As hell is a self-willed rejection of God, the omnipotent creator who gives you life, you lose balance and control of yourself in hell, shown by the inability of any figure to escape the wrath and puppetry of the Satanic demons. You cannot save yourself, because the only one capable of saving is God, who rejects and exists outside of hell. Hell represents a schism from shared life with God, as no one engages in any community. Happiness does not exist in this place of total rejection. Instead of trumpets, we see an imp, in the upper row of the madness, blowing a ram’s horn in the war-like scene. Figures to the right do not even retain their entire beings; their personhood is fleeting and melts away, surrendering to the rule of Satan and his chaos, a stark opposition to the fulfillment one will achieve upon joining God’s kingdom. Hell represents the exact antithesis of heaven.

On the other side of Christ the Pantocrator, the Coronation of the Elect and the Elect Entering Heaven entirely oppose scenes of and feelings connected with hell. Signorelli again utilized the architectural space to tell his story through paintings. He counters the scene of the Damned with a direct confrontation of the Coronation of the Elect (Figure 9).20 “The harmony

20 It is also of note that this scene also opposes, to its left side, the Rule of the Antichrist fresco. This juxtaposition provides another example of how following the Antichrist leads to destruction (and prompts another cyclical experience of the Chapel), while avoiding him in favor of the true Savior leads to paradise.

that reigns among the elect contrasts with the violent tenor of nearly all the other large murals” (Riess 80). However, just like the Resurrection of the Dead, situated diagonally from this fresco, the heavenly angels above send forth a top-down musical melody that enchants the figures, bottom-up. The clothed Elect continue to stand erect and gaze up at the heavens, again like the Resurrection, and also embrace their friends and family. Recognizing their relationships in a horizontal way, through eye contact and embrace, underscores the relationships formed in horizontal time, but which continue and grow in vertical time with God. Angels continue to aid in the upward draw of the Elect. They dance in celebration, surrounded by flowers, as they both pull up kneelers, as seen in the bottom right, and crown the Elect. The crowns of course reference the ability to enter God’s Kingdom, but I will also note that their prongs imitate the upward-reaching pinnacles that are characteristic of Gothic architecture. The vibrant colors, physical beauty, music, crowning, recognizable community of relationships, and the overflowing golden sky of stars unmistakably identity this visual opulence as “a peace beyond attainment in the worldly, political realm [that] triumphs finally in the other life” (Riess 80). An angel in the bottom right – the first directional switch of this kind throughout the space – directs the last horizontal movement of the chronicle, to officially enter heaven.

The final transmission in the journey from the last days to the Last Judgement occurs as the elect join the Kingdom of God in the Elect Entering Heaven fresco (Figure 7b). As in the Resurrection of the Dead and the Coronation of the Elect, colorful angels with flowing wet drapery and expansive wings charm the elect with music as they approach the gates of heaven through “an upward diagonal thrust” (Riess 74). An angel with white wings descends, at first reminding you of the rebellious angels of The Damned, but you soon discover that she coming

down to transport the elect into heaven. The other three angels “establish a directional axis leading into upper heaven” (Riess 78). Again, gold stars populate the background, ready to embrace the elect, in contrast to the Damned Entering Hell scene on the other side of the altar. Signorelli depicts the elect moments before they ascend to heaven. Their faces exhibit the proleptic memory of heaven, an anticipatory nostalgia for the greatness they will experience as their fullest selves in heaven, which they have strengthened in vertical time, but also during horizontal time on earth. Their hope for communion with God, the saints, and the entire community of the Church will soon be realized in heaven.

The fulfillment of Signorelli’s scenes of the Last Judgement provides a didactic journey for people to witness. While the scenes are complete, they take on a new meaning when you consider them in conjunction with the Christ as Pantocrator (Figure 10) that Fra Angelico had painted in the mid 1400s, about half a century before Signorelli received the commission to complete the decoration of the Capella Nuova.21

Standing in front of the altar and beneath Christ the Pantocrator, you are presented with images that represent potential outcomes of your eternal life; “the chapel decorations cohere about this image of Christ (Riess 90). The balance that Signorelli created allows you to weigh your choices, but his depictions should sway you to chose heaven; any faithful Catholic would desire this choice anyway, but Signorelli renders it visually desirable through his strong colors, the physical stances and emotions he grants to the figures, and the inviting directions of the figures, which the architecture, to an extent, dictates. Christ alone has the authority to rule, judge,

21 Fra Angelio, a Dominican, began the decorative program of this chapel in the late 1446, creating this Pantocrator in 1447. It is thought that he actually had the idea for the Last Judgement agenda of this chapel. He had been summoned to Rome by Pope Nicholas V in the following years, and never returned to Orvieto to complete his work (James 18). Half a century later, Signorelli received the commission to finish the decorative scheme of the chapel, including the Heavenly Court on the ceiling vaults.

and save whomever he deems worthy, based on their actions through horizontal time on earth and the relationship they have developed with Him in vertical time. Fra Angelico, who had previously completed a Last Judgement altarpiece for his own convent, San Marco in Florence, imbued his Pantocrator with themes of “repentance and intercession,” which had roots in the Dominican order to which he belonged; the themes “gave a positive view of the nature of mankind, and consequently a sense of hope at the Judgement, as opposed to the sense of despair inherent in most medieval Last Judgement compositions (James 24).22 This sense of hope makes

an impression on the visitor, who already is hopeful that they can join in the eternal kingdom of God, and it is also articulated in the figures that flank Christ, with their deportments of devotion, faith, and hope.

Christ holds a globe, wrapped around with a cross, to represent his dominion over earth, as well as his authority as supreme creator. The angels that flank him in the lower corners of this vault, blow trumpets to again sound Revelation and the Last Judgement. While He looks down at His left, to the globe, He denounces the sinners that Signorelli provided. His right hand, in contrast, gives the final invitation for Signorelli’s elect to join him. Here, the cruciform halo is realized, directly opposite the emblem of OPSM in the End of the World arching fresco; on one side, Mary is honored, while her son sits as supreme ruler on the opposite.23 If you honor the

22 James, in her article *Penance and Redemption: The Role of the Roman Liturgy in Luca Signorelli's Frescoes at Orvieto*, further explores these ideas in the context of this chapel.

23 As this Cathedral is dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, this connection draws interest. The OPSM symbol of Mary now is realized between the body of Christ as Eucharist in the Chapel of the Corporal and her son as the Pantocrator. Without Mary as a vessel of Christ’s incarnation, He could not have died for us. Further, “the majestic undertaking demonstrates the power of the sacrament of the Eucharist, proclaims the need to avoid temptation by following a path of contrition, penance, and humility, lays bare the scheming of the devil, and shatters the boundaries between this world and the next, revealing a merciful God, one nonetheless capable of inflicting horrible punishment” (Riess 9).

cross of the globe in the same way as the cruciform halo, that is, representing a cross, then you should wonder where the complete axis of the cross on the globe rests.24

I propose that Christ’s hand, as the last guiding direction, invites you to form the complete axis of the cross. Without you, the community, the Church fails. You can create the final axis of the cross in horizontal time, mirroring how this axis of the cross acts as a horizontal space through which you process to meet God, or through vertical time, if you consider this access vertical as I did when I reoriented the cathedral form 90 degrees. In serving as the final axis of the cross, you have developed in both horizontal and vertical time as you elected to choose Christ, and you have also joined in the community of the faithful to do so. As Christ makes you your strongest and most fulfilled self through salvation, you too contribute to fulfilling the community of the Church when you reject the Antichrist in favor of Jesus Christ, the only true ruler and savior.

Signorelli’s frescos promote the Church as the only vehicle through which one can journey toward salvation in order to join the communal eternity with Christ. Upon leaving the chapel, after meditation on the visual stories and encountering Christ the Pantocrator, you see the high altar where priests break the bread and sip the wine, and your attention is directed vertically upwards. Your prior experience of navigating through the cathedral – down the nave, to the Chapel of the Corporal, and then to see the End of the World and the Last Judgement unfold in the Capella Nuova – encourage you to build your relationship with God through vertical time so that you can join in on the communion of the kingdom of God. The narrative experience of the Orvieto Cathedral endows you with a pilgrimage of Church history, ending with an inspiring

24 We understand the full cross of the cruciform halo to reside behind Christ’s head.

example of how following Doctrine will guide you to the fullest life with God. In horizontal time, I hope to return to Orvieto to further pursue my thoughts while experiencing a mass in this Cathedral.

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Figure List (all from Riess).



Figure 1: Orvieto Cathedral exterior Figure 2: Columns encouraging procession



Figure 3: Diagram of the layout of the Capella Nuova

 

Figure 4: Rule of Antichrist Figure 5: End of the World



Figure 6: Resurrection of the Dead Figure 7: Elect Entering Heaven and Damned Entering Hell

Figure 7a, left: Damned Entering Hell Figure 7b, right: Elect Entering Heaven



Figure 8: Damned Figure 9: Coronation of the Elect



Figure 10: Christ the Pantocrator