

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

FRANCESCO BURANELLI

THE CURIA'S ONLY LAY SECRETARY

The Holy See isn't a member of the United Nations; it's a non-member observer?

PROFESSOR BURANELLI: Yes, we're speaking about the Holy See and not Vatican City—an important distinction. The Holy See is the Universal Church. Created in 1929 by the Lateran Pacts to give an independent and sovereign headquarters to the Universal Church, Vatican City is a territory of 110 acres, but the Holy See's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, not Vatican City, evokes all international relations. This is an anomaly, the difference between us and all other nations. To be doubly clear, it's not Vatican City that has relations with other nations; it's the Holy See. Vatican City refers only to a geographic territory, but one which guarantees autonomy to the Holy See. The Holy See operates from the Vatican City State.

So the Holy See isn't a member of UNESCO either?

Right, under the UNESCO entry "Holy See" Vatican City is the only country in the world whose entire geographic territory is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Besides Vatican City the "Holy See" entry cites extra-territorial properties in Rome: the Basilicas of St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls, for examples, that are all also Holy See's World Heritage Sites. The differences between the Holy See and Vatican City are: the Holy See dates back to early Christian times, Vatican City to 1929; international ambassadors are accredited to "the Holy See" or central government of the Catholic Church and not to Vatican City.

On December 4, 2007 The Holy Father nominated you Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Patrimony of the Church and Inspector of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archeology; please explain their responsibilities?

In the Lateran Pacts the Italian Government appointed The Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archeology custodian of all Christian catacombs which, however, remained part of Italy's cultural patrimony. Therefore the Christian catacombs, not just the famous ones in Rome, but those in many regions of central and southern Italy: Tuscany, Sardinia, Sicily, Puglia, and Campania, belong to Italy not to the Holy See, which, however, maintains them.

The Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Patrimony of the Church is the equivalent of the Holy See's Ministry of Culture. It's in charge of caring for the buildings, works-of-art, archives, li-



Galazka photo

braries, sacred music, theatrical plays, movies, documentaries, TV programs that the Church has promoted and/or produced worldwide over the centuries and is still promoting and/or producing. Under our guidance every diocese has an office which oversees the Church's local cultural patrimony. This decentralization has decreased illegal international sales and hence dispersion of the Church's cultural patrimony as well as created diocesan museums worldwide. The Pontifical Commission provides contacts and advice, not money. We're more like film directors not their producers or financial backers, although the Holy See's hoping to host a pavilion of contemporary sacred art at the next *Biennale* in Venice. A special foundation within our Commission helps finance such projects.

Are you the first lay secretary of these Commissions?

Yes, I'm the only lay secretary in the Curia.

You're curator with architect Roberto Cecchi of a unique exhibition: "Palazzo Farnese: from the Renaissance Collections of the French Embassy" on until April 17. For several generations Palazzo Farnese was the home of one of Italy's most powerful families. Commissioned in 1514 by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, it was enlarged when he was elected Pope Paul III in 1534 and then again later by two grandsons he'd appointed cardinals, Alessandro (1520-1589), an important patron of the arts, and Alessandro's brother Ranuccio (1530-1565) (their father Pier Luigi had been born before his father took vows). Its several architects during the 16th century include Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Michelangelo, Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola and Giacomo della Porta. From 1595 to 1597 Annibale Carracci embellished its interiors with allegorical frescoes for Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. Since 1874 this High Renaissance monumental palace has been the French Embassy to Italy; it's considered the most beautiful embassy building in the world. How and why was the exhibition born? What's the Holy See's involvement?

The exhibition is the brainchild of Jean-Marc de la Sablière, the French ambassador to Italy since 2007. That autumn he visited Naples' National Archeological Museum, which today houses many of the ancient sculptures unearthed in Rome's Baths of Caracalla during Paul III's papacy. These were collected by Paul III, but es-

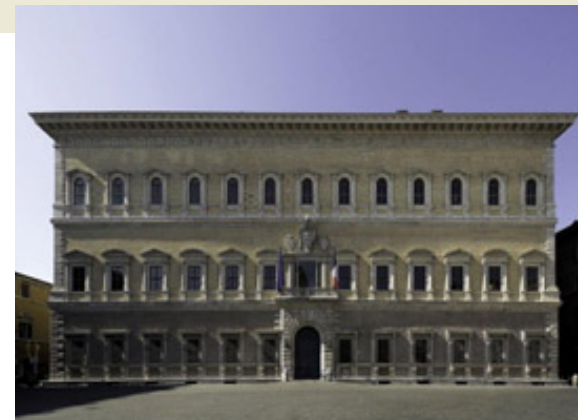
pecially by his grandson Alessandro, and displayed on Palazzo Farnese's ground floor and *piano nobile*. Indeed grandson Alessandro not only assembled the greatest collection of Roman sculpture in private hands since Antiquity, but he was also a patron of living artists: Titian, Michelangelo and Raphael as well as commissioner of the masterpiece by Giulio Clovio, arguably the last major illuminated manuscript, the *Farnese Hours*. Completed in 1546 after nine years in the making, it's now in New York's Morgan Library. As you've said, the cardinals' great nephew Cardinal Odoardo (1573-1626) continued to commission artworks. Then nearly a century later, in 1731, at the death of Antonio Farnese, the Duke of Parma and the Farneses' last male heir, the family's wealth and art collections passed to Elisabeth Farnese, the wife since 1714 of King Phillip V of Spain. Their son Charles III (1692-1766), the first Bourbon king to rule in Naples, in 1734 transferred his mother's artistic treasures there. Sabilière dreamed of bringing these ancient sculptures and other Farnese masterpieces in Naples' Capodimonte Museum and elsewhere back to their original home and of displaying them as they'd been; he made his dream come true.

Pope Paul III and his descendents built up their art collection privately, but they were all Church officials, hence the Holy See's and my involvement. Most exhibitions are monographs of great artists with their works displayed in chronological order; this exhibition is unique, a new type of cultural proposal: reassembling works-of-art dispersed worldwide for display in their original home. Through their impressive ancient sculpture collection, this display of past glories, the Farnese family deliberately intended to highlight their contemporary importance and ambition both culturally and politically.

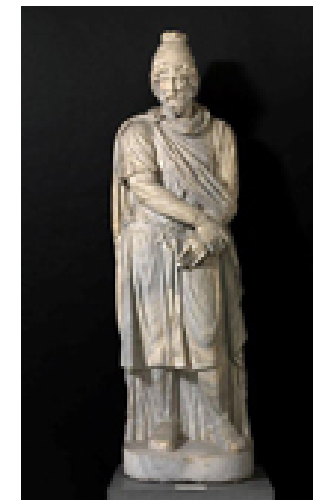
There are some 150 works-of-art displayed: paintings, statues, drawings, coins, tapestries and ceramics; what are the highlights?

The ancient Roman sculptures, in particular the *Dacian Prisoners* and *Venus Callipige*; Titian's portrait of Paul III; Scipione Pulzone's portrait of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese; ancient Roman coins collected by Alessandro; Sebastiano da Piombo's portrait of Pope Clement VII; Annibale Carracci's *Hercules at the Crossroads*, which, after two hundred years, returns for the first time to Odoardo's private study and bedroom; and, Marcello Venusti's Last Judgment; to name only a few.

As Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Cultural Pat-



Above, the facade of Palazzo Farnese (Colantoni photo). Below, ancient Roman statue of Dacian prisoner-of-war. Bottom, Scipione Pulzone's portrait of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.



rimony what other exhibitions have you been involved with?

One was last year's monographic exhibition on Caravaggio at the Quirinal, an immense satisfaction because, after my tenure as Director of the Vatican Museums during which the number of visitors doubled from two to four million annually, *Caravaggio* with its 580,000 visitors was Rome's most successful temporary exhibition to date.

Another initiative of mine is the recent opening of the Missionary Museum in the Palace of Propaganda Fide at Piazza di Spagna. Its contents emphasize the Church's commitment to evangelization throughout history and even today.

What other exhibitions is the Commission preparing?

The Farnese exhibition has inspired the Commission to reassemble and display the art of other important "papal" families in their original homes. Sorry, but I can't go into specifics now.

What non-exhibition projects does the Commission have?

To encourage dialogues through their bishops with dioceses worldwide to establish an inventory of restoration and preservation projects the Commission should support. We also want to analyze and to understand why certain churches have been sold and transformed for secular functions like pubs, restaurants, hotels, private homes, exhibition spaces etc. Is the cause lack of vocations or of parishioners?

When I telephoned to set up this appointment, you were about to go to Regensburg; why?

Regenberg's bishop Gehrhard Ludwig Müller and the director of the Diocesan Museum there actively promote religious art, something the Commission has been "preaching" for years and Pope Benedict has supported since 2009 through his meetings with artists. However, this shouldn't remain a dialogue from the top down—the Pope who invites artists—but one which rises from the bottom at the diocese-level. Local priests and bishops know their territory and their potential artists. They should advise their artists to propose works with religious themes. The diocese of Regensburg has done this so

I'm helping it to exhibit one of their artistic proposals starting April 12, the 6th anniversary of Benedict XVI's papacy and 60th of his priesthood—in a side chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, the church designed by Michelangelo in the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian. Its parish priest, Renzo Giuliano, has always strongly supported artistic dialogue. ○