

# Santa Maria in Trivio

(Church of Our Lady at the Crossing of Three Roads)



**Santa Maria in Trivio** is a 16<sup>th</sup> century conventual and former parish church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. This small church is situated near the fountain of Trevi, and takes its name, as does the fountain, from the convergence of three ancient streets in its vicinity. (1)

## History

The first church here was built as a small oratory with a xenodochium, or guest house, at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the Byzantine general Belisarius, according to the inscription over the two lower windows of its front, and the 12<sup>th</sup> century inscription embedded in the wall on the right side of the church, facing the Via Poli. (1) (b)

Until the 15<sup>th</sup> century the church was known as Santa Maria in Sinodochio. From 1571 to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century the church was known as Santa Maria dei Crociferi. The present church was rebuilt from the foundations 1570 - 1575, in the pontificate of Gregory XIII, after the pope gave the church to the Crociferi Brothers. The architect was Jacopo del Duca, and the patron was Cardinal Cornaro. The inscriptions on the façade records the rebuilding. The present fabric of the church is from that rebuilding. There was work done on the interior in 1644. (1) (b)

In 1657, the church was granted to the Clerks Regular, Ministers to the Sick who are better known as Camillians. They established their noviciate here and extended the convent buildings, with the help of a large cash donation from Pope Alexander VII. (1) (b)

In 1670 the Camillians began a complete renovation and decoration, and had the ceiling vault frescoed, and in 1675 they formally dedicated the church to the Immaculate Conception. This is the

first church in Rome with the dedication. In 1677 the sanctuary and high altar were re-ordered in a lush Baroque style. The inscription commemorating this is on the wall to the left of the entrance. It was reconsecrated by Cardinal Vincenzo Orsini for the Holy Year of 1725. (1) (b)

In 1839, the Camillians moved to the nearby church of Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio a Fontana di Trevi. Finally, Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) granted the vacated complex to the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, who still serve the church. Their founder, St Gaspar del Bufalo (a native Roman) is enshrined in a side chapel. (1)

There was a restoration in 1999, especially to the ceiling frescoes. (1)

## Exterior

This is a small church, with a simple rectangular layout of four bays with an additional rectangular apse. The 17<sup>th</sup> century convent buildings abut it to the left, and a range carries over the top of the façade. The convent entrance is the first doorway on the left, with a prominent inscription on the lintel saying *Crociferi*. The right hand side wall of the church is visible on the Via Poli. It is of thin yellow bricks, left unfinished, on a limestone plinth, and has four rectangular windows with Baroque stone frames just below the roofline. You can see the simple campanile from the street. It is a gabled brick slab on the roofline and parallel with it, and has two round-headed bell openings side by side. The early 12<sup>th</sup> century epigraph recording the foundation of the church is on the wall here. The translation is:

"Belisarius, a friend of the City, because of his faults founded this church. Therefore he who puts a foot in the sacred temple, pray often to God to have mercy on him. This is the door of the temple, defended by God the almighty".

From the text, we know that this tablet used to be over the entrance. It is the only surviving remnant of the mediaeval church. (1)

### Façade

The façade looks as if it has been glued onto a residential house, because the 17th century fabric of the convent impinges on it to the left and also above. It has two storeys, the second half the height of the first, and stands on a limestone plinth. The fabric is in unrendered brick, with architectural details in limestone. On the exterior the vault is covered by a pitched roof. (1) (b)

The upper storey is divided into three parts by four gigantic Ionic pilasters in limestone, and these support a dividing entablature which is unusually deep. The architrave of this is molded, and the cornice strongly projecting with dentillations. The upper storey has an attic plinth and a pair of pilasters with triglyph capitals, embellished with tassels and shield bosses, supporting a crowning triangular pediment. These pilasters flank an empty round-headed niche which is within an early example of a rectangular Baroque frame embellished with thin curlcues. There is a winged putto's head below this. The sides of the storey have small sweeps, and a pair of obelisk finials at the outer ends. On the pediment are three flaming torch finials. This is one of the few historical churches in Rome where the original stone central finial has not been replaced with a cross. The façade design is continued round the right hand corner, where there are two pilasters flanking a disused side entrance with a triangular pediment. (1)

The frieze in between has paneling in shallow relief, with three small windows, two rectangular and the central one oval. Two string courses run across the façade behind the pilasters, one below the smaller windows and one above the larger ones and the entrance. (1)

There is a single central doorway, with a triangular pediment over a lintel decorated with scrollwork and a central fronded bracket with a putto's head. The pediment is embellished with a pair of nodding curlcues, connected by swags to a little plinth within the tympanum. Above the pediment is the coat-of-arms of Pope Alexander VII in high relief. The entrance is flanked by two rectangular false windows with triangular pediments. Between the larger and smaller windows on each side are two tablets, with epigraphs. Together these translate as: (1)

"The order of *Crociferi* built this church of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the foundations, once erected by Belesarius an"

Adjacent to the church is the Provincialate of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. (1)

The small, intimate cloister of the convent is to the left of the church. It has arcade walks on the west and south sides only, with blind arcading on the other sides. (1)

## Interior

The interior is in the Baroque style, of the 17<sup>th</sup> century mostly. It has a single nave, with four shallow arched niches on each side within the fabric of the side walls. The arches form two arcades, and are separated by ribbed Ionic pilasters supporting an entablature which runs round the church. The two niches nearest the entrance used to be side exits (walled up in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; no trace of it exists today), while the other four are side chapels. The single entrance in the façade is on axis with the high altar. (1)

### Nave

The barrel-vaulted ceiling rests on the entablature, and has two windows within lunettes in each bay. The vault was painted by Antonio Gherardi in 1670, and his fresco work depicting scenes from the life of Our Lady covers the entire surface. His mastery of perspective is impressive. There are three central scenes:

*The Presentation of the Child Mary at the Temple,*  
*The Assumption* and  
*The Circumcision of the Child Jesus.*

The lunettes have angels and allegorical figures, while the six scenes between the lunettes are:

*The Birth of Our Lady,*  
*The Visitation,*  
*The Escape to Egypt,*  
*Christ With the Doctors in the Temple,*  
*The Adoration of the Magi* and  
*The Holy Family.*

Over the entrance is another allegorical scene. The fresco panels are separated by ribs in gilded stucco, with putti and flower swags in gilt -the overall effect is very rich. (1) (2)

The counterfaçade has a stucco angel holding a heraldic shield sitting on the segmental pediment of the window, and two more standing to the sides of the latter. (1)

In the ceiling of the sacristy is preserved a beautiful fresco of the *Triumph of the Cross*, a work by Bartolomeo Morelli of 1674. Also in the sacristy is a canvas of *The Vision of St Filippo Neri* by Antonio Gherardi. (2) (4)

### Sanctuary

The triumphal arch has a pair of ribbed Ionic pilasters, and over it is an intricate stucco relief by Gherardi from 1677 depicting *The Triumph of the Cross*. This is a reminder of the original Crociferi who built the church. The pictures on the side walls of the apse are by Cosimo da Castelfranco, apparently. (1) (4) (b)

The high altar chapel was thoroughly altered in the restorations of 1675. The chapel is elevated above the nave, approached through a triumphal arch, built on a rectangular plan, and ceiled by a barrel vault. The apse is delineated by a bowed polychrome marble balustrade. The aedicule has a pair of thin Ionic pilasters with gilded capitals supporting a triangular pediment. An early 15<sup>th</sup> century painting in the Graeco-Byzantine style of the *Blessed Virgin with Child*, of the Umbrian School, hangs over the high altar, surrounded by a large gilded Baroque gloria. It was crowned by the Vatican Chapter in 1677, with an enormous gilt bronze crown in front of the pediment. (1) (b)

The organ is placed behind the altar, and is from the 18th century. (1)

### Left side chapels:

The first arched niche on the left used to contain a doorway into the convent. A stone tablet with an inscription recording the dedication to the Immaculate Virgin in 1657 is preserved in the niche. In the same niche is the tomb of Venerable Giovanni Merlini, third successor of Gaspare del Bufalo, who led the congregation of the Priests of the Most Precious Blood from 1847 to 1873. (1)

### Chapel of St Mary Magdalen

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to St Mary Magdalen, and has an altarpiece showing her being given Communion by an angel. This is by Luigi Pellegrini Scaramuccia, evidently painted in the campaign to adorn the church for the Holy Year 1675. (1) (a) (b)

### Chapel of St Gaspar del Bufalo

The founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, St Gaspar del Bufalo (1786-1837), is buried under the altar in the second chapel on the left, in a red marble sarcophagus topped by a gilded bronze effigy by Aurelio Mistruzzi. He was beatified in 1904 and canonized in 1954. The chapel is from that date. (1) (2)

The chapel's altar aedicule is better decorated than those of the others, with a pair of Ionic columns in pale green brecciated marble. The altarpiece, in a sentimental style, looks early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapel used to be dedicated to St John the Baptist, and there are little fresco scenes from his life on the pilasters. The chapel's patron was Cardinal Luigi Cornelio, who was buried here; the inscription says he died on 6 May 1584. (1) (b)

### Chapel of St Cletus

The third chapel on the left is dedicated to St Cletus or Anacletus, the second pope after St Peter and the legendary founder of the Crociferi. The altarpiece shows his martyrdom, and is by the Capuchin friar called Cosimo da Castelfranco who has a picture in the sanctuary. (1)

A confessional has been placed in this chapel, and the altar removed.

### Right side chapels:

#### Chapel of Calvary

The third chapel on the right has an altarpiece depicting Calvary, with *Christ crucified accompanied by Our Lady and SS John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalen*. This is by Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi. (1) (2)

The altar here has been removed, and the organ console was placed here.

The chapel was built and endowed by one Vincenzo de'Surdi. The inscription commemoration de'Surdi's gift still exists but has been moved to the wall under the holy water tazza on the right of the entrance; originally the plaque was near its altar. The inscription says that de'Surdi built and endowed the chapel and that he died in 1588. (b)

#### Chapel of the Crucifix

In the second chapel on the right is a crucifix done two-dimensionally in carved and painted wood, made by artisans from Val Gardena apparently. This work has been claimed as Venetian of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or even mid 14<sup>th</sup> century, but it looks recent. (1) (2)

The archivolt is decorated with five scenes from the Passion, also painted by Grimaldi. The altar frontal is in intricate polychrome pietra dura stonework. (1)

#### Chapel of St Maria De Mattias

The first chapel on the right now has a modern altarpiece portrait of St Maria De Mattias, who was canonized in 2004. She founded the female institution corresponding to the Missionaries, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. (1)

This chapel used to be dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, and the side pilasters and archivolt have little fresco scenes from her life. (1) (a)

#### Pope John XXIII

The first archway on the right is not actually a chapel, but was the side entrance which is now blocked up. It now contains a tablet with an inscription that records a visit by Pope St John XXIII on 4 January 1963. The Holy Father came to the church to pray at the shrine of St Gaspar for the success of the Second Vatican Council.

Here also is an epigraph recording the donation of the church by Pope Alexander VII to the Camillians.

## Special notes

The feast of St Gaspare del Bufalo is celebrated on 28 December.

## Artists and Architects:

Padre Paolo Piazza of Castelfranco called Padre [Cosimo da Bassano](#) of the Capuchins (1560-1620), Italian painter  
Jacopo del [Duca](#) (1520-1601), Italian sculptor and architect of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period.  
Guido Francisi (1886-1945), painter  
Antonio [Gherardi](#) (1638-1702), Italian painter, architect, and sculptor (stuccoist) of the Baroque style  
Aurelio [Mistruzzi](#) (1880-1960), Italian sculptor  
Bartolomeo Morelli aka *Il Pianoro* (1629-1703), Italian painter  
Luigi [Pellegrini](#) detto Scaramuccia, (1616-1680), painter  
Paolo Piazza detto frà Cosimo Cappuccino (1557-1621), painter  
Giovanni Francesco [Grimaldi](#) aka *Il Bolognese* (1606-1680), [Italian](#) architect and painter

## Burials:

[St Gaspare del Bufalo](#)  
Venerable Giovanni Merlini  
Luigi Cardinal [CORNARO](#), (1517-1584)

## Location:

Address: Piazza dei Crociferi 49, 00187 Roma  
Coordinates: [41° 54' 4"N 12° 28' 57"E](#)

## Info:

### Contacts

Telephone: 0039 06 6789645  
Fax: 0039 06 6789645

### Opening times

Open 08:00am-12:00pm 04:00pm-08:00pm

### Mass schedule:

Holidays :09.00-11 .00-18.30  
Weekdays: 18.30

## Links and References:

- 1) [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
- 2) [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
- 3) [Tourist info at 060608.it](#)
- 4) [Info.Roma. web site](#)

[English Wikipedia page](#)

["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

[Youtube video of the ceiling by Nikomovies](#)

- a) Donovan, Jeremiah; ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS; 1842; Pg. 129
- b) Lewine, Milton; THE ROMAN CHURCH INTERIOR, 1527-1580; 1963; pp. 398-405
- c) Sharp, Mary; A GUIDE TO THE CHURCHES OF ROME; 1966; pp. 155-156

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