

# Re Magi a Collegio di Propagande Fide

**Re Magi** is the 17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque collegiate church of the **Collegio di Propaganda Fide**, in the rione Colonna. It is dedicated to the Magi of Epiphany, traditionally referred to as the "Three Kings". This place of worship used to function as a church, but is no longer listed as such by the Diocese. However, the tradition is that "once a church, always a church" so it should not be referred to as a chapel. (1)

## History:

The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) was founded in 1622 as part of the Roman Curia, and established on this site by Pope Urban VIII (1623-44). He commissioned Bernini to enlarge a previously existing Renaissance palazzo, the Palazzo Ferantini, as a new headquarters for the congregation. As a result of work in progress Bernini provided a small oval chapel, but he lost the commission after the pope's death and work stopped on the rest of the complex. (1)

His rival **Borromini** was appointed to finish the work, and he demolished Bernini's chapel to make way for a larger one to his own design in 1644 (this, however, contains several works of art from the previous edifice). Bernini's design involved the main entrance of the complex being on the narrow frontage of the site on the Piazza di Spagna, but Borromini provided a monumental and spectacular entrance on the Via di Propaganda. (1)

The present complex, occupying the triangular city block between the Via di Propaganda and Via dei Due Macelli, is basically the result of Borromini's efforts. However, work was not entirely finished when he committed suicide in 1667 and so was completed by his assistants in the project. (1)

The one major addition was in 1704, when an accommodation block was built on the Via Capo di Case. A result of this was that the institution expanded to occupy the entire city block. (1)

In 1842, there was a restoration by **Gaspere Servi**, during which the interior was tricked out in fake polychrome marble work. (1)

The Lateran Treaty of 1929 gave the Holy See an extraterritorial privilege over the building. This means that it remains part of the territory of Italy, but the Holy See has entire control over it as if it were an embassy. After the signing of the treaty, **Clemente Busiri Vici** was appointed to perform a restoration which took place between 1930 and 1940. (1)

The interior was redecorated in 1955. (1)

The palazzo remains the official address of what is now the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, with its postal address as Piazza di Spagna 48. However, most of its activities are now focused on the Pontifical Urbaniana University. (1)

The complex now also houses the Museo Missionario di Propaganda Fide, which was opened at the beginning of 2011. (1)

## **Exterior:**

The chapel occupies the part of the building just to the left of the ceremonial entrance façade on the Via di Propaganda. (1)

The layout of the entrance and the church by Borromini bears some resemblance to his work at Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori in Trastevere. Both sites have a monumental entrance leading into a foyer, with the church leading off to the left on entering and having its left hand side wall forming a continuation of the façade outside to the left. (1)

The enormous façade is designed as a single story, although the building behind it has two (with a third one on top, not an integral part of the façade design). Unfortunately the street is narrow and a good photographic view is not easy to obtain, but Borromini took account of the angle of viewing for anyone standing outside -the result is rather overwhelming. (1)

The fabric is in brick rendered in a pale yellow, with architectural details in travertine limestone or white render. Eight gigantic pilasters support a strongly projecting cornice. Two Borrominiesque innovations immediately present themselves. Firstly, the pilaster capitals are not Classical, but are based on the triglyph motif. Secondly, the cornice is not part of an entablature -there is no architrave or frieze. (1)

The central zone of the façade is concave, and the inner pair of pilasters are angled inwards. The cornice forms an arc between them. At the outer corners of the façade this cornice also forms a short inward arc; another design innovation by Borromini is that the corner pilasters are extra-wide, and follow this curve. (1)

The cornice, which Borromini intended to dominate the viewer's attention, is decorated on its underside with modillions (little corbels) and rosettes which are single, double, in fours or (over the entrance) in a group of twelve forming two hexagons. (1)

The entrance doorcase is immediately recognizable as being by Borromini. In travertine, it is overall slightly coved and has a pair of ribbed pilasters with incurved faces at sixty degrees. These support an entablature with posts and a projecting cornice, incurved to match the pilasters. The cornice forms an archivolt over a relief featuring a scallop shell, embellished with swags and droops. (1)

At the level of the top of the entrance archivolt, a molded string course runs across the façade behind the pilasters. This actually marks the division between the two stories behind. Each of the six sections bounded by the pilasters has a large stone-framed portal with chamfered upper corners and a Barberini bee within a curlicue on top. The left hand portals are blank, because the church is behind, but the right hand ones lead into little shops. Above each portal and below the string course is a stone-framed window. (1)

Above the main entrance is a large rectangular window within an aedicule. A pair of Doric columns support a bowed curved entablature with rosettes and triglyphs, and another pair of columns support a pair of inwardly angled posts joining onto the entablature on each side. A winged putto's head is below the curve of the entablature, and above is a small horizontal elliptical window in a sinuous frame topped by a gable. This has a palm leaf surround. (1)

To either side are three other large rectangular windows each with a small horizontal elliptical window over it. The first and the third on either side are identically designed, while the central two are different. The former have a pair of Doric pilasters supporting posts with triglyphs, and the posts in turn support an archivolt cornice which runs over the window. Within the pilaster pair is a

pair of Doric columns supporting diagonally set posts, and between these runs a strip of entablature with rosettes and triglyphs. The window itself is within a garland. (1)

The second window on each side has four Doric columns supporting a coved entablature with rosettes and triglyphs. The elliptical window above is surrounded by palm fronds, and enclosed by curlicues supporting a gable. (1)

The attic story above the main cornice matches the form of the façade, but is not part of the overall design of it. (1)

### **Interior:**

The plan of the church is based on a chamfered rectangle, with two external chapels on either side. (1)

Gigantic Composite pilasters support an entablature from which springs a coved stucco ceiling, although their capitals are not at their tops but at the level of a clerestory of large rectangular windows. (1)

The ceiling itself has oeil-de-boeuf windows at each corner, and three lunette windows on each long side. The middle one of the latter is larger. The stucco decoration, white and light grey on a darker grey background, forms criss-crossing diagonal strips very slightly reminiscent of Gothic vaulting. The central ceiling panel has the dove of the Holy Spirit in glory. (1)

The pilasters and walls were painted in a faux marble effect in the 19th century, but were re-painted in white and grey in 1955. (1)

On the counterfaçade are two allegorical figures in stucco, *Justice* and *Wealth* by **Cosimo Fancelli** 1667. (1)

A pair of busts of prelates are in niches between the chapels, and another pair flank the sanctuary apse. These are on column drums in black marble, trimmed with pink, a personal design by Borromini. (1)

### Sanctuary

Two paintings preserved from the previous Bernini chapel are in the sanctuary. The *Adoration of the Magi* by **Giacinto Gimignani** (1634) is over the main altar, which is against the far wall of a little square apse and which does not have an aedicule. A concealed window throws light onto it. (1)

The entrance to the apse is rectangular, between two of the gigantic pilasters. In other words, there is a trabeation instead of a triumphal arch. Over this is hung *Christ Gives the Keys to St Peter* by **Lazzaro Baldi**, (1671). Above this in turn is a tympanum inserted into the ceiling vault between oeil-de-boeuf windows, which contains the coat-of-arms of Pope Alexander VII between allegories of *Faith* and *Religion*. This assemblage is by Fancelli also. (1)

### Side chapels

The four side chapels are described in anticlockwise order, starting from the right hand side of the entrance. (The descriptions date from before the museum opened, so artworks might have been moved about.) (1)

The first chapel on the right has an altarpiece depicting *The Conversion of St Paul* by **Carlo Pellegrini**, (1635) and another survivor of the Bernini chapel. (1)

The second chapel on the right has an altarpiece depicting *SS Charles Borromeo and Philip Neri*, by **Carlo Cesi**. (1)

The second chapel on the left has an altarpiece depicting *SS Francis Xavier and Francis de Sales Venerating the Crucified* by **Ludovico Gimignani**, (1666). (1)

The first chapel on the left has an altarpiece depicting *The Calling of SS Andrew and Peter* by **Andrea Camassei**, (1664) which is a copy of a work by **Giorgio Vasari**. (1)

#### Chapel of Blessed John Henry Newman

A visit to the museum also includes the opportunity to visit the little house chapel in a separate part of the complex, which is dedicated to Blessed John Henry Newman the 19<sup>th</sup> century English Oratorian cardinal. It is very small, but has a spectacular stuccoed vaulted ceiling with a central fresco depicting the Empyrean. (1)

#### **Artists and Architects:**

Andrea [Camassei](#) (1602-1649), Italian Baroque painter and engraver  
Carlo [Cesio](#) or Carlo Cesi (1622-1682), Italian painter and engraver of the Roman school.  
Carlo Pellegrini (1605-1649), Italian painter  
Clemente [Busiri Vici](#) (1887-1965), Italian architect  
Cosimo [Fancelli](#) (1620-1688), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period  
Francesco [Borromini](#) (1599-1667), leading figure in the emergence of Roman Baroque architecture  
Gaspere Servi († 1861), Italian architect  
Giacinto [Gimignani](#) (1606-1681), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
Giorgio [Vasari](#) (1511-1574), Italian painter, writer, historian, and architect  
Lazzaro [Baldi](#) (1624-1703), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
Ludovico [Gimignani](#) (1643-1697), Italian painter during the Baroque period

#### **Location:**

Address: Collegio di Propaganda Fidei, Via Gregoriana

Coord: [41° 54' 15.354" N, 12° 28' 59.808" E](#)

#### **Info:**

The only access is through visiting the museum, which has an entry charge of eight euros. Guided tours are available.

Opening times:

14:30 to 18:00 Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

#### **Links and sources:**

1. [http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Re\\_Magi](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Re_Magi)

2. [http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=1944](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=1944)
3. <https://www.google.com/search?q=Re+Magi+a+Collegio+di+Propaganda+Fide&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=GU0fU8zVH67x0wGBzIGQDA&ved=0CCcQsAQ&biw=1023&bih=991>
4. <http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi164a.htm#The%20Chapel%20of%20the%20Magi>
5. [http://books.google.com/books?id=1Y\\_zV7kNgP0C&pg=PA54&lpg=PA54&dq=Re+Magi+a+Collegio+di+Propaganda+Fide&source=bl&ots=2XYTmytpEF&sig=BaXrzNwguG5FDNYe0jWgDwirp7A&hl=en&sa=X&ei=GU0fU8zVH67x0wGBzIGQDA&ved=0CD0Q6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Re%20Magi%20a%20Collegio%20di%20Propaganda%20Fide&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=1Y_zV7kNgP0C&pg=PA54&lpg=PA54&dq=Re+Magi+a+Collegio+di+Propaganda+Fide&source=bl&ots=2XYTmytpEF&sig=BaXrzNwguG5FDNYe0jWgDwirp7A&hl=en&sa=X&ei=GU0fU8zVH67x0wGBzIGQDA&ved=0CD0Q6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=Re%20Magi%20a%20Collegio%20di%20Propaganda%20Fide&f=false)