



FORMER MONASTERY AND CHURCH OF S. MARIA

You find this place of interest in Cantù 2 – Stage 2

INFORMATION

Location: the complex of the former monastery of Saint Mary, that currently hosts the City Hall of Cantù, with the annexed church of Saint Mary's, still in function, is located in the block of houses limited by Piazza Marconi, via Manzoni and Piazza Parini.

Access: you can access the City Hall from piazza Parini 4, and the church from via Manzoni 10.

Paving: piazza Parini is asphalted; in front of the entrance there is a sidewalk in porphyry cubes. Beside the church of St. Mary's the sidewalk is enlarged and there are slabs of stone perpendicular to the entrance; the footsteps are in stone,

Architectural barriers: there are none to access the City Hall. To reach the church you need to climb four steps of variable height; on the left, the last step is at the same level of the enlargement of the sidewalk.

Services: urban and extra-urban bus stops in via Volta and piazza Parini; ATM teller in Piazza Garibaldi and via Corbetta; chemist's shops in via Ariberto da Intimiano and via Matteotti;

Leisure and Food: bars and shops; public gardens in via Dante (Parco Argenti) and via Roma (Parco Martiri delle Foibe).

Other information: the former monastery, now the City Hall, can be visited in working hours. Further information on the site of the Commune of Cantù <https://www.comune.cantu.co.it/hh/index.php>.

The church is usually closed; for information see the contacts section below.

DESCRIPTION

A document states that in 1086 a Benedictine monastery was constituted by the *dominus* Omodeo Tanzi *de Canturio*, who donated it to the Benedictine monks of Saint Peter of Cluny, together with a vineyard and terrains, fields and forests, for them to pray for his soul and those of his relatives. In another document, dated 1093, Alberto, prior of the benedictine monastery of Pontida, dedicated the monastery of Saint Mary to women following the Cluniac rule; Agnes "*de Burgundi*" (the Burgundian) was designated prioress. According to tradition, Benedictine nuns introduced lace manufacturing in the territory of Cantù; according to rev. Calo Annoni the activity was instead introduced by the Humiliates.

The great monastery presents a main cloister, and a secondary one, built in a later period, possibly after the erection of the church, in the XVII century. After its suppression in 1798, during the Cisalpine Republic, the structure was transformed in a military barrack; later it was bought by the municipality of Cantù; at first it was used as a school, then, at the beginning of the new millennium, became the prestigious seat of the same municipality.

Since the XIII century the monastery received the daughters of the best families of Cantù; in the following centuries it became richer and richer, thanks to the protection of the nobility of Milan and Como, where the nuns came from. Around the half of the XVII century, the construction of a new church was decided, in order to replace the old, already renovated at the time of the bishopric of Saint Carlo Borromeo, with the division in two parts: one external, for the faithful, another interior, reserved to nuns and separated by a grid. Girolamo Quadrio, architect of the *Fabbrica del Duomo* di Milano, was charged of the reconstruction, and was later replaced by his son Giovan Battista. Works were carried on in the years from 1665 to 1683. Upon the suppression of the monastery, the church was closed, and the furniture dispersed; the church was bought by Giacinto Galimberti after the year 1802, and re-consecrated in 1839, thanks to the good offices of

the provost, rev. Carlo Annoni.

The brick facade is unfinished; a beautiful stone portal, designed by Giovan Battista Quadrio, stands out, surmounted by a great shell, with two garlands springing out of it.

The interior is sober and has an octagonal plan, featuring an alternance of straight and curve walls, that provide a cruciform look, together with the entrance, the presbytery and the two side altars. The right altar is dedicated to the *Immacolata Concezione* while the left one is entitled to *San Luigi Gonzaga*. According to Stefano della Torre, an architect, this church represents «*an attempt to reconcile the respective charm and deep spiritual meanings of the cruciform and circular plans*». The imposing dome is surmounted by a stout lantern; the weight of this powerful baroque structure rests upon four couples of large Corinthian columns.

The main altar (originally dedicated to the Holy Virgin's Nativity) leans on a painted wall, with a *trompe l'oeil* effect, simulating two windows open on the monastery. At the centre, a large altarpiece depicts the Holy Virgin with her Child and the saints Hyacinth, Adalberto, bishop of Como, two Dominican friars and two donors [*Vergine con il Bambino e i Santi Giacinto, il vescovo di Como Adalberto, due frati domenicani e due offerenti*], framed by eighteen episodes of the life of the Saint [*Episodi della vita del Santo*]. The complex was painted by an artist from Brescia, Grazio Cossali, in 1596; it was originally placed in the Dominican church of S. Giovanni in Pedemonte in Como and was donated by Giacinto Galimberti.

Three inscriptions are located in the presbytery, commemorating the translation of the bones of Agnese "de Burgundi" in 1690.

CONTACTS

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