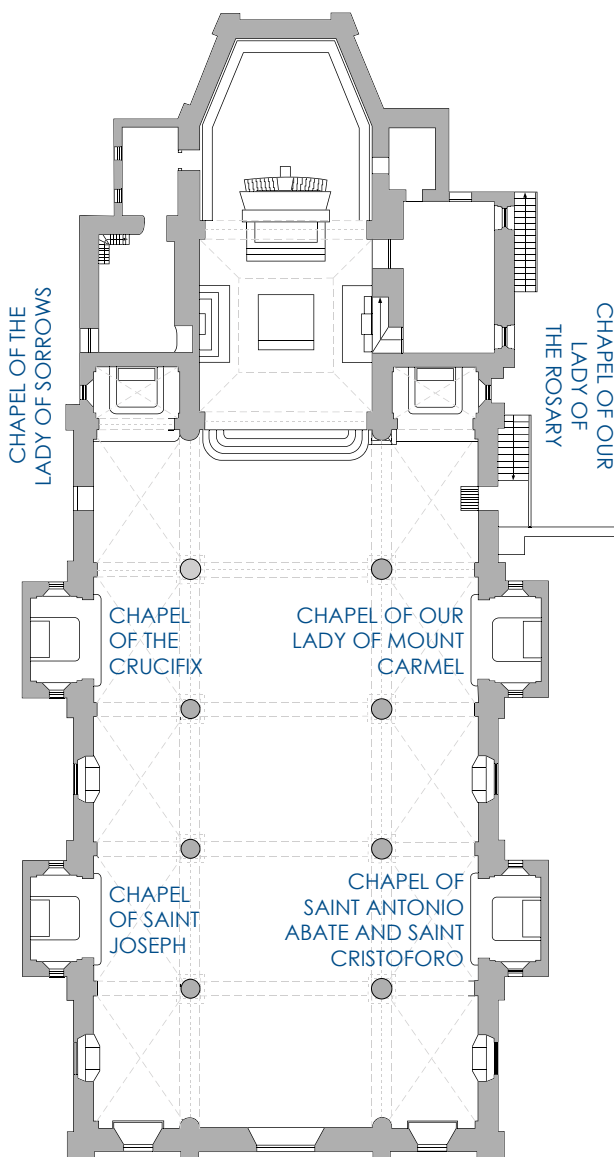




THE PARISH CHURCH OF  
SAINTS PETER AND PAUL  
IN TOSCOLANO

# CHURCH PLANIMETRY



**Title:** The Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Toscolano, edited by Letizia Erculiani

**Texts:** Antonietta Spalenza, Isabella Marelli, Guido Galli and Matteo Pian.

**Photographs:** Emanuele Tonoli art photographer

## THE PARISH CHURCH OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL IN TOSCOLANO

The parish church of Toscolano stands on a part of the area once occupied by the large Roman villa belonging to **the Nonii Arrii family (1st-5th centuries AD)**. **Antonietta Spalenza**, in the volume based on his thesis degree, entitled *The church of Saints Peter and Paul in Toscolano*, Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana, 2000, states: "**Some sixteenth-century sources** hand down that the ancient Parish Church of Toscolano was built on the **ruins of a temple dedicated to Bacchus**, according to tradition sixteenth-century historiography that considered the Christian churches built on pagan temples."

**Monica Ibsen**, in the book *Churches of Alto Garda Bresciano*, attributes **the foundation of the church primitive to the early medieval period (a few centuries before the year 1000)**. The presence of this sacred building was **attested for the first time in 1040**. The only evidence of its existence, in addition to the written source, is **the 8th century** capital located in the Romanesque mullioned window of the rectory (side towards the bell tower).

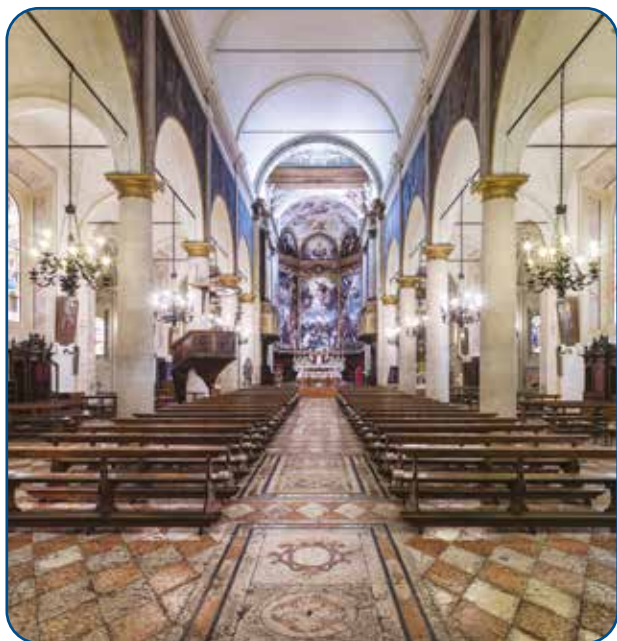
In the 12th century the early medieval temple was replaced by the parish church **dedicated to St. Peter and mentioned in 1197**: what remains of it, on the initial external left side of the current parish church, **is a round arch incorporated into the late 16th century masonry**.

**Antonietta Spalenza** provides us with two other interesting pieces of information: the first concerns **Bishop Domenico Bollani** who in 1566 decreed the extension of the Romanesque parish church, because its dimensions were no longer sufficient to contain the population. The other news refers to the archbishop of Milan, Saint Charles Borromeo, who, during his apostolic visit in **1580**, established that the previous church be completely demolished and that the new temple be built according to the model he proposed. The work was created by the **architect Maestro Bertoldo da Toscolano**. **The first stone of the new sacred building, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, was laid and consecrated on 19 March 1584**.

**"The facade of the temple** is austere, sober, classic, but unfinished, as evidenced by the baroque motifs

of the marble complexes of the central portal, with the statues of Saint Peter and two angels, and those of the portals laterals". **(Antonietta Spalenza)** The **tympanum** of the entrance portal has a broken line; the red coral breccia **columns** that support it are joined together by two **fake white marble drapes**, coming from the excavations of the Roman villa of Nonii Arrii.

"The sacred building has a clear basilica structure, with a salient system that betrays the internal division **into three naves: the central one, with a barrel roof and the two lower lateral ones, with a cross vault**". **(Antonietta Spalenza)**



**The barrel vault** is equipped with **four pilasters** which extend beyond the architrave of the nave into the pilasters above the columns. The central nave is separated from the lateral ones by **eight Tuscan columns, which means Doric**, but with a smooth shaft (not fluted), numbered in black at the base, on the back. **The Doric capitals are gilded.**

The paintings that embellish the church are, for the most part, the work of the Venetian painter **Andrea Celesti** (1637-1712). "He was able to grasp the most vital and festive ideas of baroque culture and arrived at a highly **original, almost rococo, language.** His style

is in fact characterized by a **strongly lightened and light-filled color scheme**, which creates the volume of the figures by separating them from the drawing, through loose and fluid brushstrokes that suggest the contours in a **soft and delicate way**". (**Antonietta Spalenza**)

In this study on the work of the Venetian master, the **sensitive and competent commentary of Antonietta Spalenza** is integrated, in some points, by the **interesting contributions of Isabella Marelli** who, in two publications (Andrea Celesti, T.P. Editore in San Felice del Benaco BS, 2000, and Andrea Celesti in Toscolano, Grafo, 2006), presents certain aspects of his artistic productions.

"The great paintings of the presbytery and the apse were commissioned to Celesti on **13 April 1688** by the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament who decided to "decorate the main chapel of this Church with outstanding paintings and ornaments of golden relief frames". The works were financed by the income from the assets of **Giovanni Antonio Colosini who in 1678**, the year of his death, had established the brotherhood as the universal heir of his properties". (**Antonietta Spalenza**)

The paintings that dominate the apse constitute a homage to **Saints Peter and Paul** and depict important moments of their lives.





This is the **Delivery of the keys to the apostle Peter** (center), **the Fall of Simon Magus** (left) and of **the Martyrdom of the two apostles** (on the right).

**Christ gives the keys to Saint Peter** (oil on canvas, 750 x 385 cm) Restoration: Gian Maria Casella, **2003**.  
Inscriptions: "Ego sum pastor ovium. Ego sum via, veritas et vita" ("I am the shepherd of the sheep. I am the way, the truth and the life"). (Center)

"The compositional structure, simple and

communicative, underlines the centrality of Christ, the main point of escape, recalling the sacred conversations of the sixteenth-century Venetian masters, based on the **separation between the celestial and earthly spheres**. At the sides and in front of Jesus the apostles unfold, six on each side, sketched with quick and cursive brushstrokes, through overlapping veils that replace the pure graphic design in the rendering of the forms. At the feet of Christ, an open book invites you to read a passage from the Gospel of John (Jn 10.2 and 14.6 testifying to the new role of shepherd that Peter is about to assume upon receiving the keys from the Lord (Mt 16.18 -19). Above, a triumph of cherubs accompanies God the Blessing Father, bringing to Saint Peter the patriarchal cross and the tiara which, together with the keys, represent the spiritual power of God". **(Antonietta Spalenza)**

**Fall of Simon Magus** (oil on canvas, 750 x 385 cm)  
Restoration: Gian Maria Casella, **2003**.



The painting on the left "The episode of **the Fall of Simon Magus**, who had attempted to acquire from the apostles the faculty of imparting the Holy Spirit, is narrated in the apocryphal Acta Petri, in which it is said that the Roman senator Marcellus, misled by the wonders of the magician Simon, had a monument was erected to these but, when Peter arrived in Rome, he repented and asked for forgiveness.



**The scene is built on two levels:** the **aerial** one of Simon who falls in the presence of some diabolical figures, and the **terrestrial** one of the emperor seated on the throne, the saints gathered in prayer and the crowd. The latter is characterized in an individual way by gestures and suspended, worried, intrigued glances, like that of the man with glasses in the left corner.

The composition, played on pastel, soft and lightened colours, refers to the sixteenth-century modules of Paolo Veronese in the white architecture of the background, in the material rendering of the precious dresses of the ladies and the dwarf dressed as a court page, and in the skilful scenographic score". (**Antonietta Spalenza**)

To this presentation we add some additions by **Isabella Marelli**, taken from page 28 of her volume **Andrea Celesti a Toscolano**, published in 2006: "With difficulty we can make out Saint Peter, dressed in light blue and yellow, kneeling at the foot of the staircase covered in red velvet. The episode comes from the Golden Legend by Jacopo da Varazze where it is told of **Simon Magus, who in front of the emperor Nero threw himself from a high tower**, perishing miserably,



to demonstrate that he was a more powerful magician than Peter”.



On page 43 of her previous work (Andrea Celesti, published in 2000), **Marelli** analyzes some portraits of the characters depicted in the Fall of Simon the



Magician hypothesizing that the elderly, mustachioed man wearing an ermine cape and the other old man on the left of the banner represent the commissioner of the pictorial work, **Giovanni Antonio Colosini and his cousin Giovanni Battista Sgraffignoli**, while the man with the sharp face and blond goatee, painted at the feet of the emperor, could represent **Andrea Celesti, portrayed, as per tradition, with his gaze turned towards the spectator.**

***Martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul*** (oil on canvas, 750 by 385 centimetres) Inscription: "Nero" Restoration: Gian Maria Casella, **2003**. The painting on the right

"The scene **in the foreground** represents the ***Martyrdom of Saint Peter*** (Jn 21, 18-19), tied and nailed to the cross with his head upside down, in the presence of a small crowd; on the left you can see **Nero's** standard and above a male figure with some flames in his hand, perhaps the emperor himself, an eagle and an angel. Around the saint are depicted the men who are preparing him for martyrdom, while on the left you can see figures leaning forward as if wanting to participate in the drama, with a hint of pity on their faces.



**In the background** on the right is painted the ***Decapitation of Saint Paul***, which tradition says took place on the same day as the crucifixion of Saint Peter, around 67 AD. The saint's body lies lifeless on the ground, while three people venerate his head placed on a cloth; next to them the architect of martyrdom stands triumphant, with his sword on his shoulder and

his gaze turned in the direction of the emperor. The stylistic technique enhances the naturalistic rendering of the figures, using colored shadows and a delicate and luminous color that tempers the dramatic tone of the subject." (**Antonietta Spalenza**)

Two pieces of information are added to the interesting comment by Antonietta Spalenza: Saint Peter was crucified with his head upside down because he considered himself unworthy of dying like Jesus; Saint Paul was instead beheaded because he was a Roman citizen, having been born in the imperial colony of Tarsus of Cilicia. Due to his civil identity, he therefore had the right to a less painful and excruciating death than crucifixion.

Regarding the characters represented, **Isabella Marelli** states; "Near the soldier on horseback, among those witnessing the crucifixion of Saint Peter, we can glimpse the painter's patrons: **Scipione Delay, Girolamo Tamagnini and Camillo Sgraffignoli**. It is very difficult, however, to try to match the names with the physiognomies, with the exception of the character portrayed next to the three previous ones: it is **the parish priest Don Bortolo Midani Castagna**, recognizable by his cassock".

To crown the apse, above the three large central canvases, there are **five paintings** executed in oil on canvas by **Andrea Celesti** in the years 1709-1712, **within lunettes**. These are the images reproducing **Saint Luke, Saint John, the Exaltation of the Eucharist, Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, with their attributes**.

"The latter derive from a passage from **Ezekiel (1.5-14)**, in which the prophet describes the vision of four beings, each endowed with the fourfold aspect of man (angel), lion, bull and eagle and equipped with four wings, or tetramorphs.



**Saint Luke**, considered by tradition to be a painter, is represented in the act of writing his Gospel sitting on a bull, while he looks at a painting with the Virgin and Child. **Saint John** is writing the Apocalypse, a text that was inspired by an eagle, here painted with an inkwell around her neck. On background the Virgin appears crowned with twelve stars, as handed down by the vision described by John himself. **Saint Matthew**, sitting on the base of a column, listens to the teaching of the angel who dictates the Gospel to him, while **Saint Mark**, kneeling next to a pillar and a balustrade, writes his Gospel flanked by a lion. The central lunette, depicting **the Exaltation of the Eucharist**, represents a golden chalice containing the Consecrated Host, from which luminous rays emanate, while a crowd of angels adores the Sacred Species.

**The five paintings are the work of Celesti**, who completed the work of decorating the church of Toscolano on 4 January 1712 and received, in compensation for the last works carried out, the sum of 2709 lire. After this date, his traces are lost."

(Antonietta Spalenza)

The lunettes and frescoes of the apse and presbytery were restored by Gian Maria Casella in **2003**.

## VAULT OF THE APSE AND PRESBYTERY, PILASTERS AND SUBARCHES

The **wall paintings** that decorate **the vault of the polygonal apse were painted in 1709** and are the work of Andrea Celesti and **Ludovico Bracchi**.

They depict the **Exaltation of the Cross** and bear the following inscription: CONFRAT. CORPORIS CHRISTI MDCCIX (Brotherhood of the Body of Christ **1709**). "The



**vault of the polygonal apse** represents the Exaltation of the Cross, transported to heaven by three angels, boldly foreshortened; other angelic figures sitting on a fake parapet are painted around it marble, with the symbols of the Passion: the column, the crown of thorns, the whip and the dice with which the soldiers gambled for the robe of Christ, and clusters of winged heads made with the tip of a brush.

The same authors created, again in 1709, **the Assumption of the Virgin**.

The inscription is as follows: "EXALTATA EST". The Virgin



is accompanied in heaven by highly acrobatic angels in their spectacular poses.

The panel is illusionistically pushed beyond the concrete boundaries of the vault itself by **a rich architectural quadrature** that ends with a **fake marble balustrade**, on which golden festoons with fruit rain down. The frescoed area also concerns the pilasters and **subarches of the presbytery**, where figures of cherubs display patriarchal symbols: the



mitre, the tiara, the patriarchal and bishop's crosses, and some liturgical apparatus, the candelabra and the thurible". (**Antonietta Spalenza**).



The **trompe-l'oeil** motifs with crumpled leaves that frame the lunettes and highlight the pilasters are the work of Stefano Orlandi, an ornamentalist and quadraturist, who worked alongside Celesti and Bracchi in the decoration of the apse.

## **PRESBYTERY: PLUMS OF THE VAULTS AND LONG, NARROW CANVAS**

**Andrea Celesti:** Prophets and Doctors of the Church  
Wall painting -1709

"The general project of the undertaking belongs to the elderly master himself (**Celesti**), but **probably only the Prophets and Doctors of the Church** who stand out for the most accurate execution of the design are autographed, as can be seen in the greater richness of details and in the drapery that highlights the figure". (**Isabella Marelli**)

"The powerful figures inscribed in the plumes and subarches of the presbytery vault are placed in a limited space and depict the Doctors of the Church (on the left Saint Gregory the Great, on the right Saint

Augustine; above the counter-organ Saint Jerome and Saint Ambrose) and the **Prophets** (Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel)". (**Antonietta Spalenza**)



**"The long and narrow canvases painted around the large left window denote a profound change in the**

painter's technique who opens his Garda season to a **new brightness and a chromatic lightening of the palette**. High up, above the window, we see **The vocation of Peter and Andrew**; below, in the two side canvases, tall and narrow, **the liberation of Saint Peter from prison** is represented.

In these two paintings Celesti **manages to balance light and shadow through quick touches** that underline the volume of the figures and suggest their character. The canvas located at the base of the window recalls Colosini's legacy, with the date of the beginning of the testamentary disposition: "**LEGATO IOANNIS ANTONY COLLOSINI 1678**". (Antonieta Spalenza)



The stupendous baroque frames that adorn Celesti's paintings were carved by **Tommaso Dal Prato** and **Giulio Bezzi**, and gilded by **Francesco Leoni** at the end of the seventeenth century.

On the **right side of the presbytery**, around the large window, again in **long and narrow canvases**, two episodes are represented: **the Miraculous Fishing** (horizontal canvas, above the window), and **Saint Peter healing the cripple** (two vertical panels: one on the left, the other on the right). The horizontal canvas under the window attests to **the commission to Celesti of the apse paintings, carried out in 1688 by those in charge** of managing the very rich legacy of Giovanni Antonio Colosini.

They are **Girolamo Tamagnini**, commissioner, **Scipione Delay**, vicar, **Camillo Sgraffignoli**, doctor and commissioner; their coats of arms and their names,



depicted together, are surrounded by a ribbon that unites them. The long and narrow canvases on the left and right side of the presbytery were restored by Gian Maria Casella between **1991 and 1993**.



## ORGAN CHOIR LOFT

**“On the left wall of the presbytery stands the organ loft**, divided into three panels, the bottom of which is decorated with carved golden spirals and tritons. The two lateral ones present lake landscapes, painted inside ovals. The central mirror has a wooden and **golden grate arranged in a herringbone pattern**; above the parapet there is a low screen with two volutes and a central vase.

**Above and below the screen there are two molded frames** rendered in a uniform white colour.

The **wooden case**, set against the wall and contemporary with the organ, is characterized by **two imposing fluted columns** to which **the two large closing doors** painted in 1690 by Andrea Celesti are fixed. **The space for the facade is divided into five bays by four thin pilasters** richly decorated with golden candlesticks motifs; in the center they bear binding festoons characterized by phytomorphic elements and with musical cherubs. Above them there is an imposing frame with golden spirals in the

band; **the top, in front of the semicircular window, is dominated at the ends by two enormous volutes** with statues of reclining female figures and **in the center a large statue of Saint Peter.**

**The first organ** was built by **Costanzo Antegnati in 1590.** **The case and the choir loft** were left in rough wood until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when they were **carved by Giulio Bezzi shortly before 1701,** **decorated by an anonymous artist in 1709, stuccoed by Lodovico Bracchi and gilded by Francesco Leoni in 1712.** In 1822 Fra Damiano Damiani enlarged the instrument. The last fundamental intervention **was carried out in the second half of the 19th century by Giovanni Tonoli who rebuilt the organ**". (From the file *Historical philological restoration of the organ*, edited by **Guido Galli and Matteo Pian**)

To this interesting presentation we add information relating to the **modern restoration**, carried out by the master organ builders **Guido Galli and Matteo Pian**, over a period of approximately three years (**2017-2020**). Their work has given Toscolano a prestigious historical-musical monument which enriches not only the parish church of Saints Peter and Paul, but also the cultural heritage of Lake Garda. **"The organ doors, opened, show a splendid Annunciation:** on the left the **archangel Gabriel** is represented with the lily, a symbol of purity.



The figure is set diagonally to create greater spatial depth and is carefully studied in every detail, in the large drapery and in the formal refinements of a decorative nature of the curly hair, characterized by

luminous filaments. On the right door the **Madonna** is depicted kneeling at a lectern, while in the foreground on the left there is a straw chair with a white cloth. This realistic detail gives the scene a **domestic, intimate, familiar character**, typical of Lombard realism which brings the faithful closer to the religious event through a **deeply narrative and immediate style**.



The closed doors depict the **Adoration of the Magicians**, a balanced composition, played on warm tones. On the right, Maria, seen from the front, is holding Jesus, while behind her is **Saint Joseph**, leaning on a stick, relegated to the shadows.

The **Magicians** are depicted on the left, according to the diagonal scheme corresponding to the order of the offerings set out in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 2, 1-12)". (**Antonietta Spalenza**)

The restoration of the organ doors was carried out in **2016** by the Marchetti and Fontanini company.

The balcony of the counter-organ has features very similar to those of the structure that faces it; in the upper part it is dominated by the canvas of the **Adoration of the Shepherds**, while the decorations, columns and volutes reproduce the models that adorn the choir. **On the top of the counter-organ**, in front of the large semicircular window, two partially reclining female statues are sculpted laterally, above two enormous volutes, at the **center of which the simulacrum of Saint Paul rises**.

"In the **Adoration of the Shepherds** the scene denotes an effective narrative taste: the Child, placed on

the straw on some steps, is surrounded by poor and humble shepherds who adore him with delicate gestures and enchanted gazes, enveloping him in an atmosphere of warm family intimacy and of devout meditation.



Celesti wants to convey the **human and divine character of the birth of Jesus** through the description of a poor environment, a ruined hut and a naturalistic insert on the left, and of truly human figures, characterized by their working attributes.

Saint Joseph is a little in the shade, on the left. **Maria is painted with soft touches of light and color**, which allow her typically celestial physiognomy to emerge, with large eyes and a rosy face. The study of the **lights that animate the night is particular: the artificial one of the lamp, the natural one of the sky and that warm, intense and divine luminosity that the Child releases**. At the top, the scroll, supported by the angel's hands, recalls: "**Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax**". (Antionietta Spalenza)

The restoration of the painting was carried out in 2009 by the Marchetti and Fontanini company.

The center of the presbytery is dominated by the **high altar rich in marble and volutes**; it was originally made of gilded wood, but, between **1760 and 1774**, the parish priest, Don Bartolomeo Canetti, decided to decorate and enrich it, entrusting the task to the architect **Gaspere Turbini**.

The artist created a solid and elegant product, a faithful reflection of the eighteenth-century style. On the left wall, below the organ loft, there is an **excellently made bishop's chair**, dated **1612**.

The back wall of the apse, below the three large paintings by Celesti, is embellished with **twenty-five valuable eighteenth-century choir stalls**, complete with **thirteen statuettes**.

Also interesting from an artistic point of view are the **eighteenth-century confessionals** located along the walls of the naves. **The** pulpit, which is accessed via a small staircase, is placed against the third column on the left. It dates back to 1612, like the bishop's chair, and is an **admirable work**, sculpted with great skill and a wealth of detail.

In front of the left half-column, there is the statue of the **Immaculate Madonna**, dated **1910**. **On the right side**, in front of the half column, there is **the baptismal font**, consisting of a white stone basin, covered, in the upper part, by the font cover, an octagonal **structure** of brown wood.

## SIDE CHAPELS

After having examined the paintings and frescoes of the presbytery and choir, we now take into consideration the side chapels, of which only the name is stated, because, in the explanatory tablets located in front of each chapel, the dedication and the commentary are indicated, for example work of **Antonietta Spalenza**.

The church has three naves and is divided, on each side nave, into two chapels to which another chapel is added in front of the faithful.



The chapels are therefore, in total, three on the left and three on the right. Each of them is equipped with an altar decorated with an altarpiece.

The following chapels open in the left nave: the **\*Chapel of St. Joseph in Glory with other saints** (painting by **Andrea Celesti**, dating back to the very **early eighteenth century** and restored by Seccamani) and the **\*Chapel of the Crucifix**, for which it is appropriate to point out that the altarpiece, due to incorrect restorations and heavy repaintings, did not appear to be in harmony with Celesti's style.



The careful restoration, carried out in **2006** by the Marchetti and Fontanini company, made it possible, however, to recognize the **hand of the Venetian painter** in the canvas and therefore to establish that he was the author of the work, which can be dated to the **early 1790s**. At the end of the left nave, there is the **\*Chapel of the Addolorata**, also called the Pietà or the Deposition. The author of the painting above the altar is **Sante Cattaneo** (the dating could refer to **1764**).

The restoration was carried out by the Abeni Guerra company.





On the right side, starting the visit from the back of the church, you can see the **\*Chapel of Sant'Antonio Abate and Saint Cristoforo** (painting attributed to **Pase Pace, 1603**, restored by the Marchetti and Fontanini company), the **\*Chapel of Our Lady del Carmine** (painting attributed to **Pase Pace, 1602-1603**) and, at the end of the right nave, the **\*Chapel of the Our Lady of the Rosary**, (altarpiece by Andrea Celesti dating back to the **beginning of the eighteenth** century and restored in the years **2000/2001** by the Marchetti and Fontanini company).

## COUNTER FACADE

On the counter-façade, above the entrance portal, a canvas of considerable size and intense drama is painted: it is **the Massacre of the Innocents**





commissioned by the **Municipality of Toscolano to Andrea Celesti in 1700.**

The artistic frame that delimits it is the work of the carver **Tommaso Dal Prato**, who also created the frames of the paintings in the presbytery. "The painting reveals a now mature pictorial approach: the transition between the foreground and the figurines in the background develops gradually, through a solid **perspective system and a tonal gradation of the architecture, the human figures and the landscape.** The fulcrum of the scene is represented by the soldier on the left, moved towards the center, filmed in the act of throwing himself at a child. In the vastness of the scene, some narrative passages stand out in which the tragic nature of the subject is expressed by the figures characterized by a **realistic psychological characterization of the face** and a naturalistic rendering of the physiognomy"

**(Antonietta Spalenza)**

"**The nocturnal setting underlines the dramatic tone of the scene,** giving rise to multiple tragic and moving episodes. In particular, the figure of the mother who clings to the soldier's arm to prevent the dagger from falling on her son, together with the soldier and the child, forms a group that seems inspired by Hellenistic statuary". **(Isabella Marelli)**

The work was restored in **2006** by Gian Maria Casella.



## LUNETTES (INTERCOLUMNS) OF THE CENTRAL NAVE

"**The ten canvases** that cover the lunettes of the arches of the main nave are part of a homogeneous pictorial cycle from a thematic and stylistic point of view: in fact they **represent** episodes taken from **the life of Jesus and were created between 1700 and 1702**, thanks to bequest of five hundred scudi from **Donato Colosio**, a prominent exponent of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament. **The date and name of the client, combined with his family coat of arms, a tower with three stars, are painted in the two lower corners of the first lunette on the left**, representing the Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem". (**Antonietta Spalenza**)

### Episodes painted in the lunettes

#### Right side of the central nave

*\*The Flight into Egypt*

*\*Child Jesus among the doctors of the temple*

*\*The Transfiguration*

*\*The Multiplication of bread and fish*

*\*Christ and the Centurion*

#### Left side of the central nave

*\*Jesus' entry into Jerusalem*

*\*Jesus drives out the defilers of the temple*

*\*Resurrection of Lazarus*

*\*Healing of the paralytic at the Probatic Pool, where the sheep and other animals were washed before the sacrifices*

*\*Dinner in the Pharisee's house*

"The ten episodes that illustrate the public life of Jesus are **distributed over the arches that mark the central nave, according to the widespread custom in Venetian churches. Celesti** abandons very crowded compositions and **opts for a symmetrical scene structure** that places Christ at the center of each episode and on the sides, compressed in the narrow spaces, he distributes the supporting characters who

assume positions suggested by the structure and dimensions of the canvases. **The theatrical effect is also underlined by the dark settings, lit up by bright colors and the vast repertoire of various humanity**".

**(Isabella Marelli)** "Despite the elevated position, the poor lighting and the deterioration of the color, we notice how certain human typologies do not correspond to Celesti's stylistic features; in particular, a certain executive superficiality can be seen in the way of outlining the physiognomy of Christ and in some slightly overloaded figures, almost as if the student, in referring to the master, has accentuated his peculiar characteristics.

For these reasons, **the presence of collaborators in the final phase of the works must be assumed.**"  
**(Antonietta Spalenza)**

## INSCRIPTIONS PLACED IN THE TOP PART OF THE COUNTER FAÇADE

**On the right side**, for those looking at the counter-façade, above the door, there is a Latin inscription, the translation of which reads like this: "To the most illustrious and most reverend lord **SIGNOR MARINO GIORGI** bishop of Brescia, duke, marquis, earl and other, who in the year **1620** in the major week (of the liturgical year), among all the illustrious (churches) of his marquise (episcopate) (he chose) this one, in which he conferred the **sacred universal ordinations** and consecrated the **sacred oil**.

Thus he wanted (to consider) the church as the favorite wife of his marquise (episcopate).

The esteemed Municipality of Toscolano posed with gratitude, maintaining a grateful heart for such an honor".

This inscription informs us about the **consecration of the church**, which took place on **Holy Thursday 1620**, by **Bishop Marino Giorgi**.

**On the left wall of the counter-façade, at the same height**, we read an undated Latin text, but relating to two important interventions presumably carried out in **1702**, at the conclusion of the execution of **the Massacre of the Innocents** and the depiction of **ten evangelical episodes** in the intercolumni (lunettes) of the central nave.

**The translation is as follows:** "To God Excellent Maximus. Having completely demolished the ancient temple of

Benaco and built this (temple) in a more august form, which public religiosity had erected in the year of the Lord **1584**, the pious charity of the legate of the lords **Giovanni Antonio Colosini** and **Donato Colosio** adorned this shrine with **paintings surrounding the intercolumniations**. Finally, a decree from the **esteemed Municipality** completed and crowned the internal façade of the temple with the **Martyrdom of the Holy Innocents**. This is to the greater glory of God."

**PLEASE NOTE: Isabella Marelli**, on page 161 of her volume **Andrea Celesti**, states: "The canvases were created by will of **Donato Colosi** who in his will dated **27 September 1700** made a bequest to the parish church of **500 shields** to execute illustrious paintings that would fill the half moons between one column and another in the central nave". This quote is reported because there has been no news of a bequest from Giovanni Antonio Colosini in favor of the paintings in the central nave. The author of the inscription probably did not want to forget the patron who, with his will of 1678, had begun the iconographic enrichment of the church.

## VIA CRUCIS

At the end of this itinerary among the valuable works that adorn the church of Saints Peter and Paul, we cannot forget to focus our gaze on the oil paintings hanging on the walls of the side naves.

They reproduce the fourteen **Stations of the Via Crucis** and were painted in **1935** by Professor **Piero Piccioni** from Biella. These works, although very distant, in terms of pictorial style and manner of representation, from the splendid canvases of Celesti, fit well **into the richness of the iconographic heritage of the church**, integrating the evangelical narrative through the representation of the sufferings of Jesus during his journey to Calvary, and of the pain of the Mother who participated in the drama of her Son. The faces of the characters who witness the path of the Via Crucis and the crucifixion of Christ are essential, profoundly expressive and internally participants in the tragedy that takes place in the spirit and flesh of the Savior. What has been written for the stained glass windows also applies to these representations: each era offers its own contribution and expresses its own spirituality in consonance with the style and methods of the time in which the work of art was created. It is therefore not appropriate to establish a comparison between paintings belonging to different eras, but it is instead important to recognize in each

artistic manifestation the meaning of what it wanted to communicate to us through the image.

This is the consideration that arises from the visit to the church of Saints Peter and Paul, during which we experienced feelings of lively aesthetic admiration and we meditated on an eternal message addressed to every human creature, beyond the confines of space and time.

## **DAMIANI ORGAN**

### **Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul**

### **The Damiani organ in Toscolano**



The Damiani organ preserved in the Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Toscolano presents some unique characteristics and other particularly relevant ones in the Garda Lake landscape:

- The extraordinary baroque chest created by prestigious organ-building dynasty of the **Antegnati** ed comparable in beauty and richness only to that of Salò Cathedral, also **Antegnati**;
- The imposing closing doors, embellished with the wonderful paintings by Andrea Celesti with the *Annunciation* and the *Adoration of the Magicians*, also comparable only to those of the Salò Cathedral painted by Palma il Giovane, and together with these, unique in all the diocese and province of Brescia, located in their original location.
- The organ is inserted inside the spectacular complex of the presbytery of the church of Toscolano, constituting

its natural completion.

- It is the largest and therefore most versatile **single-keyboard** instrument on the entire Brescia side of Lake Garda, where there are some larger instruments, but equipped with **2 keyboards**.
- Its extraordinary history dates back to **1590**, the year in which the **Antegnati** organ-building family from Brescia, well-known and appreciated for the beauty of their instruments, was commissioned to build an organ in Toscolano.
- **Friar Damiano Damiani**, the only Capuchin friar in the history of Italian organ building to have built an organ, and a brilliant exponent of the Lombard organ building school, a pupil of the very famous Serassi Brothers of Bergamo, expanded the elegant instrument **in 1822** that we can all admire today.
- The quality of the construction materials, metal pipes, mechanics and top-quality wooden material, meant that this organ could be counted among the masterpieces of Friar Damiano Damiani and constituted, at the time of its construction, an instrument far superior to all those preserved in the rich city of Brescia.

## The restoration of 2017 – 2020

The restoration project involved the recovery and integral restoration of all the mechanical and phonic components (pipes) of the Toscolano organ, also reconstructing those missing parts or registers of which the certain presence or modification was found.

Only materials suitable for the original were used, respecting all the rules for correct conservative restoration in agreement with the main protection offices. The number of organ pipes was 1430, but after the end of the restoration it is now 1522.

The recovery of this instrument is functional firstly for the liturgy, and secondly for the performance of concerts for organ alone or with ensemble. Its phonic characteristics allow it to range over a very vast repertoire from the most ancient music to contemporary provocations with a particular breadth of possibilities in the romantic-operatic field.

The recovery of the monumental organ of Toscolano is a further and very important piece, crowning and enriching the already fervent and significant musical realities of Toscolano-Maderno.

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