

SAINT JOHN BERCHMANS CHURCH (Saint-Michael's Jesuit Community)

THE CHURCH'S HISTORY

In the rear apse of the church two memorial tablets commemorate the laying of the corner-stone in 1908 and the consecration of the church in 1912. This consecration is also commemorated by the copper crosses on the semi-columns of the nave.

After the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical reforms which followed, several transformations were carried out in 1968 without, however, altering the original conception of the building.

The purpose of this church is to form the vital center of a collège. Just as the entire schoolbuilding, the church also is conceived in Romanesque style of the Renish type, but with a discreet adaptation. The architects were Gellée and Prémont.

The church is dedicated to St. John Berchmans.

John was born at Diest in Brabant in 1599. From 1612 on he studied classics at Mechlin (Mechelen), where, in 1616, he entered the Society of Jesus. In 1618 he was sent to Rome to continue his studies. After a short illness he died there full of joy on 13th of August, 1621. By his sincere piety, natural charity and continued good disposition he was well beloved by everyone. His feast is on the 16th of November.

THE FAÇADE

The façade, constructed with blue freestone and rose building stone from the Gilleppe, raises its apse on Saint-Michael's Boulevard. It is decorated with a statue of the Archangel, guardian angel of the Collège. Two Romanesque style entrances on the apse's right and left side lead to a kind of antechambre, a reminder of the narthex.

THE INTERIOR

The interior disposition is very classical : three central naves cut by a small transept. The ground plan is a "latin cross" : the top (the choir) and the base (the back of the church) form each one a round apse.

The monolithic columns of polished granit from Labrador rise up on speckled bases of cream-coloured Larrys. The heads of the columns in white Euville stone, each one with a different motive, constitute with the pedestals and the baldachins of the statues the main ornamental motive of the interior.

The organ loft gives the central nave a tall, somewhat slimmer aspect than that of the average Romanesque buildings.

THE STATUES

In the central nave on top of the heads of the columns are placed the statues of six Jesuit Saints, each one identified by the initials written on the pedestals.

1) on the left, from the back of the church toward the altar :

- * St. Alphonse Rodriguez (1533-1617), door-keeper in the collège of Majorca ; feast on the 31th October.
- * St. Francis Hieronymus (1642-1716), apostle of Napels ; feast on the 2nd July.
- * St. Stanislas Kostka (1550-1568), Polish novice, died in Rome at the age of 18 ; feast on the 13th November.

2) on the right, moving toward the altar :

- * St. Peter Claver (1580-1654), during 37 years apostle of the Negro slaves in Colombia ; feast on the 9th september.
- * St. Louis of Gonzaga (1568-1591), young Italian prince, who died in Rome of the age of 23, in the service of pestiferous ; feast on the 21st June.
- * St. Francis Borgia (1510-1572), Viceroy of Catalonia and third Superior General of the Jesuit Order ; feast on the 3d October.

The statues of St Alphonse Rodriguez and St. Peter Claver excepted, all the others are works of Van de Capelle.

THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS

1. Lower windows.

The stained-glass windows come from the workshop of Mr. Ganton-Defoin of Ghent.

Going from the Holy Sacrament chapel (left front) toward the rear apse, then returning on the other side as far as the chapel of Our Lady (right front) one can follow the main events of Christ's life.

- The Holy Sacrament chapel (left front) : Annunciation, Nativity.
- Left nave : Jesus in the Temple, Wedding at Cana, Dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus blesses the children.
- Rear apse : Sermon of the Mountain, Tempest pacified, Jesus with Martha and Mary, Transfiguration.
- Right nave : Jesus walks on the water, Jesus forgives the sinful woman, Entry in Jerusalem, Last Supper.
- Our Lady chapel (right front) Apparition of the risen Lord, Ascension.

2. The choir stained windows.

They are the work of Mr. Stalins, Antwerp.

* In the centre, Holy Trinity : "Pietà" of the Father, who holds the cross; between the Father and the Son, the dove, symbol of the Spirit. Under the Holy Trinity, St. Michael, patron saint of the Collège, and St. John Berchmans, patron saint of the church.

* Around the Trinity :

- Upper row (from left to right) :

The four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and the Four Church Fathers (Gregory the Great, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome).

- Lower row :

8 Saints of the Society of Jesus (Louis of Gonzaga, Francis Borgia, Francis Xaver, Ignatius of Loyola, Stanislas Kostka, Francis Hieronymus, Peter Claver, Alphonse Rodriguez).

3. Transept rose-windows.

- Left : "Tree of Jesse". Around the Virgin Mary one can see the personages of the Old Testament, ancestors of Christ.
- Right : Around St. Joseph, patron Saint of Belgium, some saints from Belgian history or honoured in different Belgian cities.

THE PAINTINGS

Way of the Cross

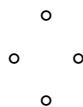
Work of Ernest Wante. Before the first station a fresco painting representing Jesus' agony and after the last comes the Resurrection.

Side door tympan

- Left : communion and death of Louis of Gonzaga.
- Right : features of St. John Berchmans's devotion :
pilgrimage to Scherpenheuvel,
promise to defend the Immaculate Conception.

THE ORGAN

Work of Kerkhoff, famous organ builder of the early 20th century. This big romantic organ, with three keyboards, a pedal board and 36 organ-stops is considered as one of the most beautiful music instruments of the Capital.



Happy are those who hear the word of God
and obey it.
(Lk 11,28)

Come to me, all of you who are tired
and burdened
and I will give you rest.
(Mt 11, 28)