

## The Pisa Baptistery Pulpit between *elocutio* and its functional dimensions

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to question the narrative dimension of the pulpit of the Pisa Baptistery Pulpit, made by Nicola Pisano in the mid-thirteenth century. The analysis focuses on how the six sculptures above the capitals of the columns on which the five sides make up the upper register of the pulpit and which present reliefs with scenes from life of Christ. The identification of the six figures above the capitals of the columns in conjunction with the reliefs on the five sides of the upper register of the pulpit has given rise to various interpretations. In this approach, I considered it important to refer to the liturgical, educational and moral functions of the pulpit and the possible relations of the parishioners with it, as well as the social and historical context.*

**Keywords:** *pulpit; Baptistery; Pisa; elocutio; virtues;*

### ● Introduction

The Pisa Baptistery Pulpit, made by Nicola Pisano, between 1257–1260, has a hexagonal shape and is raised on seven columns, six of which form a ring around its outer part, while one is in the center. At the base of three of the columns are carved lions looking inwards, and at the base of the middle column are carved figures in crouched positions. The upper register of the pulpit consists of five sides (the sixth part was opened for access), which presents reliefs with scenes from the life of Christ, namely: the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation at the Temple, the Crucifixion and the Last Judgment. The five sides rest on the six columns, which make up the lower register of the pulpit. The capitals of the columns are adorned with prominent acanthus leaves and are connected by trilobate arches, bordered by carved reliefs, in which prophets and evangelists are represented. The arches are separated by six sculptures, located in the corners, between the reliefs, above the capitals of the columns. Their identification proved to be problematic, as no general interpretative consensus was reached on them. In general, however, they were associated with either biblical characters or allegories of Christian virtues. In the Middle Ages the canon of the main Christian virtues consisted of the three theological virtues: Faith (*Fides*), Hope (*Spes*) and Charity (*Caritas*) and four cardinal virtues: Justice (*Iustitia*), Prudence (*Prudentia*), Fortitude (*Fortitudo*) and Temperance (*Temperantia*)<sup>2</sup>. These were associated with vices, often considered the expression of the seven Deadly Sins. The theory of virtues and vices, present in medieval theological texts and represented in illuminated manuscripts, gradually began to expand in terms of portable altars, reliquaries, baptistery, bell towers, churches, being the prerogative of sculptural representations, painting or fresco<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Bejczy, István P. 2011. *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages. A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Katzenellenbogen, Adolf. 1989. *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art: From Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press & Medieval Academy of America, pp. 27–46.

- **The spiritual and civic dimension of the Pisa Baptistery Pulpit**

According to the customs of the late medieval period, the Baptistery of Pisa was a product of the patronage. Although we do not know for sure who ordered the pulpit or who established its shape and content, its creation can be seen as part of the renewal and revitalization brought to Pisa by Archbishop Federigo Visconti. Therefore, Nicola Pisano's pulpit can be seen as a product of the patronage of Archbishop Federigo Visconti (1254–1277), who understood well the traditions of his city, being an expression of the temporal aspirations of the Commune and the Church of Pisa, an expression of medieval traditions from Pisa<sup>4</sup>.

Federigo Visconti assumed the Archdiocese of Pisa in 1254 amid internal political instability and the redefining of the Church's prerogatives in society. The Visconti family had long been among the strongest clans in the city, playing an important role in the political, economic, and religious life of Pisa. Although his importance as the leader of the Church of Pisa is clear from the documents preserved, Federigo Visconti's participation as patron of some artistic creations of the time is more difficult to establish. However, there is evidence that he was concerned with both the physical renewal of the city of Pisa and its political and spiritual life<sup>5</sup>. Regarding the role of the Baptistery in the late medieval period, it was more than just the place of baptism, in addition to the important role in the spiritual life, it also had a fundamental role in the civic one. However, Federigo Visconti, familiar with the problems of art and patronage, understood well the multiple functions of the Baptistery. The interest in the Baptistery of the late Middle Ages, evident in their large-scale reconstruction and sumptuous decorative programs in their structures, at a time when the rite of baptism was increasingly simplified, highlights its civic function. For the mass baptisms of adult converts, an important ceremony in the calendar of the early Church, had largely disappeared, and by the thirteenth century, even the baptism of children had lost its elaborate liturgical position. However, during the 11th and 13th centuries the great Italian Baptistery underwent reconstructions or additions, the Pisa Baptistery being the only one whose program included a pulpit that still survives *in situ* almost in its original form. The existence of a pulpit in the Baptistery has created confusion among art historians, as there are few things in the medieval baptismal liturgy that would necessitate such an elaborate and expensive structure<sup>6</sup>. In this respect, in order to understand the importance of the baptistery building and the need for Nicola Pisano's pulpit, Eloise Angiola considered that we should examine the baptistery and the rite of baptism in the context of the medieval commune.

Starting with the decoration of the baptismal fonts, Irene Hueck and Antje Middeldorf-Kosegarten concluded that they were more widely used in the past than they are now and that they most likely served their cities as parish churches. Frequent use of the building would also explain the need for Nicola Pisano's pulpit. Information from other church calendars suggests that while the Baptistery may not have functioned as a parish church, it has certainly been used more than twice a year. According to the Order of the Cathedral of Lucca dating from the late thirteenth century, the Baptistery of Lucca, in addition to hosting the baptismal rite, served as a station church for Holy Saturday and as a place for Liturgy and Vespers on other occasions, including holidays of Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist<sup>7</sup>.

Enrico Cattaneo claimed that baptism is both a religious rite and a civic symbol, and in support of this statement he cited a number of cases in which a baptistery hosted the purely

<sup>4</sup> Eloise M. Angiola. 1977. „Nicola Pisano, Federigo Visconti, and the Classical Style in Pisa”. *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 59, nr. 1, pp. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

civic and secular activities of the commune. He gives a series of information about the Baptistery of Florence, noting that donations made to the city were accepted in the Baptistery and that the general council of the commune of Florence often met there – the city leadership was hosted in the Baptistery. If the "generale consilium comunis Florentinae" met in the Baptistery of Florence, it is unlikely that the Baptistery of Pisa was also used as a meeting place for civic or ecclesiastical groups. Moreover, it can be speculated that the Baptistery may have served the provincial synods appointed by Archbishop Federigo Visconti, who met in Pisa in 1258, 1261, and 1262<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the medieval baptistery was of central importance in the life of the community. It was a symbol of civic unity and functioned in both the religious and secular affairs of the city. There are indications that the relationship between the archbishop and the baptistery was very close, both through the role of the archbishop as administrator of the sacrament of baptism and through his participation as head of the Church in the activities of the commune. Thus, the commissioning of Nicola Pisano's pulpit can then be seen as the logical result of the position of the Baptistery of Pisa in the life of the city.

Lisa Marie Rafanelli considers that the panels of Nicola Pisano's pulpits represent a transition from previous representative traditions characterized by more symbolic or objective religious images to a more expressive, communicative, instrumental Christian art. While written and visual narratives were well-established components of both Christian teaching and church decoration, both underwent significant changes beginning in the mid-13th century. More than ever, the visual arts were geared toward instruction and *the affective stimulation of godliness*. These phenomena were largely due to the rise of mendicant preaching orders in the 13th century. The revivalist tendencies of the Mendicans, propagated through a new, emotional, affective style of religious instruction, were intended to make the biblical text more vivid and true to real-life experience<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, Hans Belting noted that new trends have involved the storytelling of the Bible in a "novel-like" manner, inviting empathy or "emotional participation" from the public in order to increase faith<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the visual arts of this period also became more affective, showing a new emphasis on the instructive pictorial narrative that communicated feelings and emotions, as well as the story of the biblical text<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the reliefs of Nicola Pisano's pulpit highlight this paradigm shift, due to new cultural and religious trends. More precisely, it is about the emphasis on preaching during this period, which beginning to gradually gain independence from the rites of the Liturgy. Therefore, it can be said that Nicola Pisano made a similar emotional connection through "rhetorical" tools of gesture and gaze, perhaps inspired by the new instructive way of preaching, as well as by elements of local rhetoric, models specifically chosen to contribute to the creation of this emotional pictorial narrative. For we are talking about a competitive religious environment in which the pulpit could be used as a symbol of preaching, not only for liturgical purposes but also in public relations.

- **The Pisa Baptistery Pulpit – an important space for religious ritual**

If the Pisa Baptistery is part of a tradition of medieval written and visual narratives, which involved the desire to create an effective mode of narrative delivery – *elocutio*, then the

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<sup>8</sup> Enrico Cattaneo. 1970. „Il battistero in Italia dopo il Mille”. In Gilles Gerard Meersseman, *Miscellanea*. Padova: Antenore, pp. 171–190.

<sup>9</sup> Lisa Marie Rafanelli. 1996. „A Reexamination of Nicola Pisano's Pulpits for the Pisa Baptistery and Siena Cathedral”. *The Rutgers Art Review*, vol. 16, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Belting. 1985. „The New Role of Narrative in Public Painting of the Trecento: *Historia* and Allegory”. *Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 16, *Symposium Papers IV: Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151–152.

identification of the six figures above the capitals of the columns must be put in conjunction with the iconographic program of the pulpit, which served as an important space for religious ritual and thus became the target of public attention. Creighton E. Gilbert hypothesizes that this iconographic program may be related to intellectual products of the time, such as the moral writings of Thomas Aquinas or Vincent de Beauvais<sup>12</sup>. He proposes an identification of these figures and explains them in conjunction with the reliefs on the sides of the hexagonal structure, in this sense being able to identify a complex and unitary iconographic program.

Read from left to right, starting from the right side of the open side of the pulpit, the six figures can be described as follows: a woman carrying a child that carrying a filled vessel; a male nude, derived from a classical figure, identified as Hercules; a barefoot woman with her head covered, wearing a coat that covers only her knees; a fully clothed woman in rich folds and holding a dog in her arms; a figure of a saint holding a lamb and a winged angel, dressed in sacred robes, seated on a throne, holding in his left hand a plaque with a relief illustrating the scene of the Crucifixion and under whose throne is represented a lion biting his neck a deer<sup>13</sup>. Each of the six figures is at the junction of two scenes in the upper register, and each figure may be related to each of the two figures on the other side of the two flanking scenes. Therefore, the reading of each of the six figures must be understood in this conjunction.

If we start with the fact that the iconographic program is a Christian one, then the six figures in the corners must be interpreted in this context. In this sense, on the one hand, they can be associated with characters from the biblical text, and on the other hand, they can be associated with allegorical representations of virtues, with their origin in medieval texts<sup>14</sup>. The woman carrying a child, which has a stuffed vessel opening the register of representations above the capitals of the columns, being positioned at the beginning of the narrative cycle in the upper register, marked by the scene of the Nativity, was interpreted as Ana carrying Samuel at the house of God<sup>15</sup>. In the interpretive register of the allegory of virtues, the figure can be identified as *Caritas*, as she has the attribute of a child, even if her attribute is usually a baby she carries in her arms, while in this representation the child walks, being carried by the hand. Also, the full vessel that the child is carrying can be associated with another attribute of *Caritas*, which appears in other representations as carrying a basket full of fruit.

Eloise M. Angiola considered that the identification of *Caritas* is not justified in this iconographic program. The identity of the woman, who is seated, wearing a crown with a single star-like crown in the center and whose beauty has a delicate, graceful and expressive quality, must be associated with Esther, an Old Testament heroine responsible for the salvation of her people. For the Medieval Church, the Book of Esther was rich in Christian significance. The rejection of the disobedient queen Vashti and the election of Esther to be the new queen of King Ahasuerus of Persia was interpreted as a foreshadowing of the rejection of the Synagogue in favor of the Ecclesia. "The special importance of Esther in exegetical literature is based on the Marian interpretation given to her story. In her role as a solicitor, for the Jewish people, in front of her husband, she is a type of Mary, the Queen of Heaven, who intercedes for man at the final Judgment of God"<sup>16</sup>. One of the important qualities that can be associated with both Mary and Esther in their role as mediators is Mercy / *Misericordia*. For, at the Last Judgment, Mary's mercy is the one that tempers God's justice, the two, mercy and

<sup>12</sup> Creighton E. Gilbert. 2000. „The Pisa Baptistry Pulpit Addresses its Public”. *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 21, nr. 41, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Jesse M. Gellrich. 2000. „The Art of the Tongue: Illuminating Speech and Writing in Later Medieval Manuscripts”. In Hourihane, Colum (ed.), *Virtue and Vice, The Personifications in the Index of Christian Art*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, pp. 93–119.

<sup>15</sup> Creighton E. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Eloise M. Angiola, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

justice, being the two faces of God's judgment. In addition, medieval theologians considered Mercy / *Misericordia* to be one of the names of Esther (Esther 2: 7): "Esther is interpreted as *hidden* and is called by another name, Hadassah, which means mercy"<sup>17</sup>.

Eloise M. Angiola considers that the child, represented next to the female, holding a basket, can be interpreted as Esther's attribute, mercy / *Misericordia*, in the same way that Judith's dog illustrates her fidelity. Although in the thirteenth century there were no still images for allegorical representations of mercy, according to theologians, mercy / *Misericordia* was closely linked to charity, but while charity embodied both *amor Dei* and *amor proximi*, mercy referred exclusively to compassion and generosity towards one's fellow men<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the allegories of charity usually sought to clarify the duality of his nature: love of God and generosity to his fellow ones. Such a representation is also found in the Arena Chapel in Padua, where Giotto, a few decades later, described the virtue of *Caritas* as a woman holding a basket filled with one hand while raising to God the other hand holding her heart<sup>19</sup>. The child carrying the basket on the pulpit in Pisa, interpreted as an attribute of Esther, can be considered an example of mercy, *amor proxim*, *marimea*, which is part of charity. Moreover, the expressive female figure, whose posture denotes leaning forward and holding the child with both hands, suggests compassion, which is an important aspect of mercy / *Misericordia*<sup>20</sup>.

The figure represented nude, which has its origins in a possible representation of Hercules, can be read as an allegory of the virtue *Fortitudo*. Creighton E. Gilbert considers that the representation of three lions with Hercules refers to a possible association of this figure with Judah and argues with the biblical text of Genesis, where it is about James, who assigns the roles of his sons, patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel, Judah being described as "a lion cub (*catulus leonis*)", from whom Christ was born, who is called in the text of Revelation "the lion of the tribe of Judah"<sup>21</sup>.

Eloise M. Angiola considers that the naked male figure, of classical inspiration, can be commonly identified as Hercules, the killer of the Nemean lion, and in the role of virtue it is the representation of *Fortitudo*, identified by his attribute, the lion. For example, *Fortitudo* is also represented on the pulpit of the Cathedral of Siena or on the pulpit of Giovanni Pisano for the Cathedral of Pisa, as a female figure next to which is a dead lion. The figure on the pulpit of the Baptistery of Pisa is among three lions, a male lion, barely visible behind the figure, a lioness and their cub. One of the hands of the male figure rests carelessly over the mouth of a lion, which Eloise M. Angiola considers can suggest that the figure can be interpreted as Daniel, sitting unharmed in the lion's den. Thus, Daniel sits on the pulpit in Pisa as a symbol of the resurrection following death. For the medieval church, Daniel's experience was a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection. The inclusion of such a representation in the context of baptism is not unique, said Eloise M. Angiola, but is also found on a carved interior capital of the Baptistery of Parma, where a figure is represented in a sitting position and surrounded by living lions, one of which rests his paw on his knee<sup>22</sup>. The fact that the figure is depicted nude, considers Eloise M. Angiola, shows that Nicola Pisano was not inspired by medieval representations of St. Daniel, where the saint is fully clothed, as in Parma, but from the early Christian sarcophagi, where he is usually depicted standing, naked, among lions, as

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas P. Lackey. 2005. „Giotto in Padua: A New Geography of the Human Soul”, *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 3/4, pp. 553–571.

<sup>20</sup> Eloise M. Angiola, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Gilbert E. Creighton, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Eloise M. Angiola, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

for example on the sarcophagus in Camposanto<sup>23</sup>.

The next two corners of the pulpit, reading the iconographic program from left to right, show the figures of two women, one dressed briefly and the other in a garment with very rich folds, which suggests a visual complementarity. In a Christian interpretation, Creighton E. Gilbert refers to the episode of the Presentation of the Temple, a scene that is also found in the upper register and that the two figures frame. Thus, forty days after the birth of Christ, the Virgin Mary went to the temple to be purified. According to custom, mothers had to bring a lamb and a dove to the temple, which the priest offered as a sacrifice to the God, and those who could not bring a lamb because of poverty could bring two pigeons<sup>24</sup>. If we refer to the relief in the upper register, we notice that Joseph, who accompanies the Virgin Mary, holds two pigeons in his hands, as mentioned in the biblical text of the Gospel of Luke. C. E. Gilbert, in his interpretation, discusses the tandem of poverty – wealth, with reference to the same biblical text of the evangelist Luke: "The Lord, though rich, being made poor for our sake, wanted to sacrifice to the poor, that by his poverty he might enrich us in the faith, and that we might become heirs of his kingdom in the future"<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, the poverty that Christ endured at birth was by virtue of the richness of the Afterlife, which involves the redemption of all. For the figure represented in the form of a woman clothed in rich folds corresponds to the junction between the scene of the *Presentation at the Temple* and that of *the Crucifixion*, the first being connected with the legitimation of Christ in this world, and the second with His exit from it. Referring to an interpretation in terms of the allegory of virtues, C. E. Gilbert proposes to identify the woman who wears poor clothing with a sub-virtue, namely *Paupertas*, referring to the image of St. Francis' engagement to her<sup>26</sup>, so to a principle of monastic life, or with *Innocentia*<sup>27</sup>, and the woman in the rich garment, with *Prudentia*, problematic association, as he himself acknowledges, because the figure does not present any attribute in accordance with the traditional representation of this virtue. C. E. Gilbert also proposes an association of the woman dressed in poor clothes with Eve, after the fall, arguing that her attribute, the spindle, was broken<sup>28</sup>. The interpretation of this figure as Eve is of particular importance to Eloise M. Angiola as well. She plays a key role in the pulpit's iconographic program, being associated with the *Synagogue*, and the relationship between her and Adam, which meant the loss of Paradise, is reflected in the relationship between Mary, who is the *Ecclesia* – the bride, and Christ, who is the new Adam by which original sin is washed away<sup>29</sup>.

However, if we correlate the significance of the biblical text with a possible symbolic representation, then I consider that we could associate the female character, dressed in brief, with the allegorical representation of *Humilitas*, as identified by Eloise M. Angiola<sup>30</sup>, because Christ, although rich by his divine nature, he comes into the world poor to save humanity, which can be interpreted as an act of humility. The figure can also be visually associated with the iconographic representation of the *Temperantia* virtue, as it was made by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, four decades later. In the same interpretive register of the symbolic understanding of the biblical text, I believe that the female figure clothed in rich folds may be an allegory of the virtue of *Fides*, since faith is the way that brings salvation,

<sup>23</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup>Gilbert E. Creighton, *op. cit.*, p. 24–27.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 19

<sup>28</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup>Eloise M. Angiola, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 14.

that is, the riches of the world beyond spirituality, or the richness of faith, is the way to reach the perfection of The Afterlife. For, as written in the biblical text, Christ presents himself as poor in this world, in order to enrich us in the faith, in order to conquer The Afterlife. The dog she holds in her arms may be another indication of this, as this animal is by nature associated with Faith. E. M. Angiola identifies the figure as Faith / *Fides*, based on the dog he holds in his arms, quoting from R. Salvini and L. Réau, who question the presence of the little dog, a medieval symbol of marital fidelity and attribute of Judith, the heroine of the Old Testament and the widow devoted to Manasses, faithful to him even after his death<sup>31</sup>.

Referring to the figure of the saint holding a lamb in his arms, whose identification was associated with St. John the Baptist<sup>32</sup>, Creighton E. Gilbert speaks of an awkward approach when we aim to identify this figure with an allegorical representation of a virtue. However, the author refers to the biblical text from the *Gospel of Mark*, to discuss this figure in tandem with that of the winged angel, who holds in his left hand a plaque with a relief illustrating the scene of the Crucifixion: "I will send my messenger (*ángelus*) and he will pave the way"<sup>33</sup>. This reference to the *New Testament* is also associated with a reference to the prophetic book of Malachi from the *Old Testament*, which associates this messenger (angel) who will prepare the way and the role of judge<sup>34</sup>. But if we look separately at the two biblical references, then, in a symbolic interpretation, I consider that the figure associated with John the Baptist, who according to the biblical text is sent to "prepare the way," may be associated with the allegorical representation of Prudence / *Prudentia*. For it was John the Baptist who preached in the wilderness that "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"<sup>35</sup>. He was the one who called for repentance and a virtuous life. In addition, if we look at the upper register of the pulpit, this figure is placed between the scene of the Crucifixion and that of the Last Judgment. Proximity to the scene of the Last Judgment may refer to the fact that man may be placed among the righteous or not, following the Last Judgment, depending on the life he led on earth, the way he followed the example of Christ.

The other figure, of the winged angel, clothed in sacred garments, holding in his left hand a plaque with a relief representing the scene of the Crucifixion, and which closes the narrative cycle, by the scene of the Last Judgment, signifies, by association with the text of the prophetic book Malachi, of the Old Testament, the role of judge. According to the interpretation given by St. Augustine, in the *City of God*, the angel bears the attribute of the *New Testament*, because that plaque can be understood as a book with a representation of the Crucifixion on the cover, so plausible to be the *New Testament*<sup>36</sup>. Creighton E. Gilbert refers to the biblical text of the *Gospel of Matthew*, according to which "the blood of the New Testament, (...) is shed for many"<sup>37</sup> and to a chapter from the *City of God* by Augustine, from which he quotes to justify the angel's association with the judge: "I will draw near to you in judgment" or "the day is coming when (...) all who do evil will be stubborn (...) but for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will come"<sup>38</sup>.

The placement of the angel, who bears the attribute of the *New Testament*, under the Last Judgment, in which Christ is represented on the throne as Judge, strengthens the interpretation in which we are dealing with a judge. In interpreting the allegory of virtues, the figure may be

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Creighton E. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> The Gospel of Matthew 3:10. In *Holy Scripture*. 1944. București: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert E. Creighton, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> *Apud* Gilbert E. Creighton, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

the representation of the virtue of Justice / *Iustitia*. Eloise M. Angiola considered that the seated angel holding a representation in relief depicting the scene of the Crucifixion was mistakenly identified with Archangel Michael or as an allegory of faith, because, she asserted, the figure could only be the Archangel Gabriel, the good angel, "nuntius nostru salvationis"<sup>39</sup>. As in the relief depicting the scene of the Crucifixion, the subject described on the representation in relief is not simply the crucified Christ, but the moment when his right side is pierced by the soldier's spear, and according to medieval theologians, that is when the Ecclesia of Christ was born. the way Eve was created from Adam's shore. Holding the relief depicting the scene of the Crucifixion, Archangel Gabriel is at the same time the messenger of the Incarnation, of the Passion and of the birth of the Church.

### ● Conclusions

The pulpit program of the Pisa Baptistery proposes a complex iconographic representation. Religious ideas embodied in its sculptural decoration are organized around the important precepts of medieval theology. The interpretation of the six figures forms a unit that amplifies the main themes of the pulpit as presented in the five embossed panels. According to these interpretations, they broaden our understanding of sin and salvation, of the role of the church as well. The pulpit reflects the concern of his patron, most likely Federigo Visconti, from his early years at the head of the Church of Pisa, for the architectural renewal of the city and for the commissioning of works of art. For the Baptistery was more than just the place of baptism, it played important roles in both the spiritual and civic life of the medieval commune, and Visconti, familiar with the problems of art and patronage, understood well the many functions of his. Impregnated with a Christian content and proposed within a structure that was meant to be used by the clergy and viewed by the public, the iconographic program of the pulpit of the Baptistery of Pisa proposes a narrative dimension, which involves an educational side, closely related to the problematization of virtuous life. It works as an educational project, as a moral code, a kind of guide that can guide the clergy, but also the believers, to avoid sin, in order to gain eternal life.

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<sup>39</sup> Eloise M. Angiola, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

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