

NICOLA AND GIOVANNI PISANO PULPITS by Anita Fiderer Moskowitz, *Harvey Miller Publishers 2005, 362 pages, 250 black and white illustrations, 8 colour illustrations, \$156, hbk*

Between 1260 and 1311 Nicola Pisano and his son Giovanni created four great pulpits, 'extraordinary sculptural monuments', in the Tuscan cities of Pisa, Siena and Pistoia. Those by Nicola are found in the Baptistry at Pisa and in Siena Cathedral, those by Giovanni in the Church of Sant' Andrea in Pistoia and the Cathedral at Pisa. They are unusual for a number of reasons. They are free-standing, supported by a series of columns that rest on various allegorical figures, rather than projecting from a wall or pillar. They are polygonal rather than rectangular or circular. They are decorated with narrative reliefs presenting moments from the life of Jesus about which the preacher was also likely to be speaking. Moskowitz seeks to explain why their makers chose to innovate in these ways.

The pulpits have been well-studied but rarely as a group. Such an approach, she believes, offers new insights into the history of pulpit design, function and iconography. The art historical discussion, richly illustrated by wonderfully detailed photographs, is very interesting, the book itself a handsome production. She argues that these two artists had already introduced into prevalent Romanesque artistic traditions many of the classicising ideals that were to form a major component of Italian Renaissance art. She discusses the traditions of pulpit structure from which they depart as well as the impact their pulpits had on the sculptural vision and carving techniques of some major Renaissance artists, in particular Donatello, Jacopo della Quercia and Michelangelo.

Moskowitz seeks to show also that the pulpits embody many of the intellectual and spiritual concerns that contributed to changing perceptions about the natural world and the nature of religious experience. Their embellishment with narrative reliefs rather than decorative or symbolic motifs reflects a new naturalism which, she says, marks them as belonging to high scholastic culture. Another characteristic product of that culture, the new urban-centred mendicant orders, fostered a more direct, empathetic relationship between ordinary mortals and God. The Pisano pulpits were not only profoundly informed by these new conditions and concerns but also contributed to changing perceptions about the natural world and the nature of religious experience.

A conviction from which she works is that a major work of sculpture is a visual, tactile, kinetic and conceptual phenomenon, open to both visual and verbal interpretation. This is why the text is lavishly supported by detailed photographs: language and illustrations complement, supplement and illuminate one another. There is interesting discussion of the liturgical functions of ambos, lecterns and pulpits in the first chapter. It seems fair to acknowledge, as she does, a new era in the history of preaching that begins with Franciscans and Dominicans. Preaching and theatre are compared in the *artes praedicandi* of the time and the great pulpits were used not only for preaching but for other religious (displaying relics, for example) and even civic occasions. The theological mysteries spoken about in homilies are articulated in the images on the pulpits. This is one of the reasons for the introduction of narrative reliefs, so that what was being preached might be more easily perceived by the listeners / onlookers.

Each pulpit then has a chapter devoted to it, examining its structure and content, and seeking to identify the conditions that led to its construction. It may have been the circular space in which Nicola was asked to make his first pulpit that encouraged him to think of a polygonal structure. The reliefs are for the purpose of telling a story. Moskowitz shows how movement is brought into the stone, the reliefs arranged in such a way that the onlooker is brought into the story, to follow the movement of the narrative. The pulpit is itself a preaching. The naturalism and psychological depth these artists achieve is partly due to their combination

of Gothic influences from north of the Alps as well as their return to classical models, an influence coming from Nicola's place of origin in the kingdom of Ferdinand II.

There are many fascinating details. The first monumental male nude since antiquity is found on the Pisa Baptistery pulpit, its influence to be seen later in Jacopo della Quercia's *Adam* and Michelangelo's *David*. The Pistoia pulpit shows Saint Joseph in the guise of an ancient philosopher and Mary as pregnant on Calvary. That she suffered the pains of childbirth at the crucifixion was, apparently, an idea found in early mendicant preaching. The Pisa Cathedral pulpit shows Mary on the side of the damned, gesturing to Christ, while cupping her breast.

The final chapter traces the legacy of the Pisano pulpits. Their most important and visible impact was on later masters, not so much on pulpit typology as on the sculptural vision and carving techniques of 15th and 16th century masters. Michelangelo knew of them through his work on the tomb of Saint Dominic at Bologna, originally sculpted by Nicola Pisano. Michelangelo's never-executed plans for octagonal pulpits in the Duomo at Florence and for the tomb of Julius II show the influence of the Pisanos. And so do his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, his *David*, and even the statue of Moses (a part of Julius' tomb that was made).

Although it promises more to the theologian than it manages to deliver this book achieves its main goal: to offer to a popular readership a detailed introduction to what must be the most interesting pulpits in the world. The power of the narrative reliefs is irresistible, however, supporting theological reflection for those who are so inclined and certainly encouraging meditation on the mysteries of God incarnate.

VIVIAN BOLAND OP

BY KNOWLEDGE AND BY LOVE: CHARITY AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE MORAL THEOLOGY OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS by Michael S. Sherwin OP, *The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2005, Pp. xxiii+270. \$54.95 hbk.*

'Vision and choice in morality' says it all, almost. Published in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* in 1956, this was the title of a seminal paper by Iris Murdoch (she was 36 and had taught philosophy at Oxford since 1948). Her target was the 'current view' in moral philosophy, as it was then: 'morality is essentially rules'; 'the moral life of the individual is a series of overt choices which take place in a series of specifiable situations'; and moral words cannot be defined in non-moral terms because the agent freely selects the criteria. In contrast with all this, Murdoch sought to highlight the 'conceptual background' of choice, and the 'vision' of the chooser, which led her to defend a certain 'naturalism': 'The true naturalist (the Marxist, for instance, or certain kinds of Christian) is one who believes that as moral beings we are immersed in a reality which transcends us and that moral progress consists in awareness of this reality and submission to its purposes'. She developed this theme in two lectures delivered in 1962 and 1967 respectively, reprinted in 1970 in *The Sovereignty of the Good*, one of the classics of modern English philosophy.

Enter Michael Sherwin, currently teaching at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, framing this beautiful study of Thomas Aquinas's account of the virtue of charity in terms of a parallel contrast in Catholic moral theology. The widely used pre-Vatican II seminary manuals viewed the moral life primarily in terms of rules and their application to cases, sometimes quasi-deductively, to determine the merit or sinfulness of acts. 'Invincible ignorance' might mean that a person's subjective relationship with God could be good even though his or her