

Both pieces are signed by the author at the bottom of the central session. In the left apse there is an interesting panel showing the *Nativity of Jesus*. The "Company of the Blessed



Sacrament" commissioned this work, as we know from the inscription on the right lower part of the panel. The panel, restored around 1988-1989, has been dated back to the first decade of the 1500s and ascribed to a Lombard painter whose style reminds the one of Leonardo Da Vinci. In the centre of the presbyterial area, above the wooden choir (17th century) is a 16th century panel showing the *Vir-*

gin and Child, which comes from the Church of Loreto. This painting is currently inserted in a precious golden wooden frame with vegetal motifs that was actually part of a monumental 18th century cathedra. Above the painting, in the presbytery lunettes, we can admire the restored *The Prophets* and *The Sibyls*, two frescos painted by Scipione Crespi of Tortona in 1570. On the right wall of the presbytery is a painting representing the *Annunciation* (restored in 1989) which was made by the Milanese Giovan Mauro della Rovere, called il Fiamminghino. He was actively working in and around Tortona during the first decades of the 1600s. In the apse at the end of the right nave, inside a golden wooden frame is the *Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, a painting from Liguria that is datable to the first half of the 1600s. On the right nave's wall is the painting showing *St. Louis of Toulouse in admiration of the dead Christ* by Giuseppe Vermiglio of Turin, whose chiaroscuro reminds of Caravaggio's paintings (second decade of the 1600s). On the counter façade is another 17th century painting representing the *Pietà*: the Blessed Virgin Mary holds her dead son on her lap surrounded by St. John The Baptist, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Filippo Neri. In 1984 the office of the "Monuments and Fine Arts" began a work of restoration to save some scraps of frescoes covered by decorations dated 1912. They brought to light a noteworthy *St. George and the Dragon* in the central nave on the first bay right wall, datable to the last quarter of 15th century.

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DIOCESI DI
TORTONA

PROJECT OPEN CHURCHES

SANTA MARIA CANALE TORTONA





Santa Maria Canale is the only church in town to retain the antique Romanesque style, even if modified by several restorations along the years. According to some scholars, in the early Christian Age the ancient cathedral of Santa Maria was connected with the baptistery by a portico. An interpretation of the name “Canale” comes from the presence of several karst springs canalized to supply the water needed for the ritual of the “baptism by immersion”. According to another interpretation this name comes from the formation of runoffs during heavy rain, that from the surrounding hill flowed into the area where the church is located. The church is located. The actual **façade** is gabled with angle buttresses and two slim pilasters alongside the high portal. However, the wall's structure draws attention to the original double-sloped profile. The lower part of the façade features large sandstone blocks followed by alternating cotto and sandstone



blocks. Two simple oculi are visible above the secondary portals, which are also surmounted by a lunette. The central portal shows a splay of little pillars and semi-columns ending in capitals with stylized acanthus leaves or palmette motifs. Just above the central lunette is a large cotto window datable to the 14th century. It replaces the original rose window, of which only the round arch is still visible. Beneath the top of the façade is a little Greek-cross window with four circular painted ceramic basins in the final part of the arms: this Byzantine pottery is dated around the first half of the 12th century. The upper part of the facade is a saw-toothed brick cornice leaning against cotto brackets with geometric decorations and heads motifs. The **interior** of the church is composed of three naves. The central nave has a rectangular-plan choir that dates 1564 and two side aisles ending with semi-circular apses. The three naves are divided into: four spans, a non-projecting transept and a presbytery. The roof, originally a roof truss, was replaced in the 14th century by rib cross vaults. The vaults are supported by pillars with a rectangular section connected by two semi columns leaning longitudinally and held up by stone plinths. The pillars sandstone capitals are not identical and they feature two groups of stylized vegetal elements.

One group of capitals is datable to around 1040, the other one dates around 1165. Two lateral chapels open on the side of the aisles. On the left aisle there is the Chapel of St. Louis with a stucco decoration from the 18th century and other three decorations that were remade at the beginning of 20th century. On the altar of St. Louis there is a golden Lombard wooden statue of *The Holy Mary received into Haven*, stylistically datable to the early 18th century, and coming from the church



of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Loreto in Tortona. On the right aisle we find the chapel of the Sacred Heart Jesus. The chapel was rebuilt at the beginning of 20th century according to the design of the architect Delle Piane of Tortona and decorated by Rodolfo Gambini of Milanese origin, who chose Alessandria as his adoptive town. Rodolfo Gambini also painted the two triptychs on the side walls: the one on the left representing the *Last Supper*; the one on the right depicting the *Crucifixion*.