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Visual, Verbal, Mental, and Living Images in Early Modern Catholicism

Francis de Sales and Adrien Gambart

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Introduction

[1] The episode in the history of the visual communication of the sacred that this paper explores is the image-making activity of a major and highly influential figure of the early modern Catholic reform, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), and one of his most important interpreters, Adrien Gambart (1600-68). Francis de Sales was the early seventeenth-century French-speaking Savoyard bishop of Geneva compelled to reside in exile in Annecy because his see city was Calvinism's citadel. One of the best educated and most learned men of his day, Francis studied humanities and philosophy at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont in Paris, while also attending classes at the Sorbonne; subsequently, he attended the University of Padua, where he studied law to please his father, receiving the doctorate *in utroque jure* (i.e., canon and civil law), and studying theology to please himself since he had already discerned a

vocation to the priesthood. During his lifetime, Francis was renowned as a model Tridentine bishop, one of Christendom's greatest preachers, a best-selling author, a much sought after spiritual director, and the founder – together with St. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641) – of one of the major new orders of the Catholic reform, the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. The only French-speaking saint to be canonized in the seventeenth century (1665), Francis was declared a doctor of the church in 1877 (on Francis's life, see Ravier).

[2] Adrien Gambart never met Francis de Sales in person, but came to know him through two of the saint's "living relics": his writings and the Visitation Order" (cf. Wright and Power: 12). After being educated at the Jesuit collège in Amiens, Gambart studied theology in Paris. Ordained a priest in 1633, he shortly thereafter joined the Congregation of the Mission (better known as the Vincentians or Lazarists), recently founded (1625), by St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). Vincent had become a close friend of Francis during the bishop's 1618-19 sojourn in Paris, and, on his departure, Francis entrusted Vincent with the care of the Visitation Order in Paris. At Vincent's direction, Gambart initially assisted the aged, ailing confessor of the second monastery of the Visitation in Paris, located in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, and then succeeded him at his death in 1635. In this role, Gambart earned a solid reputation as a spiritual director, being deemed by Mother de Chantal as "a very holy and capable man" who "is a treasure" (Jacques de Laize de Bresche's biography of Gambart, quoted in Guiderdoni-Bruslé 2005: 18-19). Gambart was likewise esteemed for his in-depth knowledge of Francis's writings, and sure grasp of the Salesian spirit, evident in several anthologies of Salesian texts he published, but, most especially, in his masterwork, *The Life of St. Francis de Sales in Symbols*, a book of emblems visualizing Francis's life and virtues, published in 1664, in anticipation of the saint's canonization the following year (Guiderdoni-Bruslé 2005, 2006; Dodin).

[3] It is often said that "context matters." Before turning to Francis's and Gambart's image-making, it is helpful to consider briefly the broader context of thought about the interrelationship of the various kinds of images that they construct and/or speak about in their spiritual writings. This overview forms the backdrop against which we will view the range of images that are found in play in Francis and Gambart.

Images in Play

[4] Until the eighteenth century, there was "not the sharp division of seeing from hearing, the visual from the verbal, that we have become so accustomed to making that we are often unaware of how unusual it is" (Carruthers 2008: 291; see also 2006). Such a division was foreign to early modern Catholicism, as well as to classical and Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages. A picture referred not only to an image painted on a page, wall, or canvas, but also to the mental image that a reader's or listener's imagination crafted in the mind's eye from a verbal or word-image heard or read (Carruthers 2008: 276-79).

[5] For our medieval and early modern forebears, the terms "visual" and "seeing" encompassed what is seen by not only the body's eyes, but also the mind's eye, and, it might be added, for the mystics, the eyes of the soul (Thompson).¹ During the Middle Ages, there

¹ With her customary balanced approach, St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-82) enlisted devotional paintings and sculpture in support of her own spiritual experience, energetically acquired them for the monasteries she

was a hierarchy among these modes of seeing, in which mental images were “held to be superior to immediate visual images” because they were the product of the imagination, whose “constructive power transcend[s] sense experience” as “the faculty that can form an image independent of immediate visual stimulus” (Kolve: 27, 20). As we will see, this confidence in the imagination came to be much more guarded during the early modern era.

[6] From antiquity on, mental images serve as mnemonic aids, thus relating the craft of “making mental images or cognitive ‘pictures’” (Carruthers 1998: 3) to the art of memory. The task of the art of memory is not rote repetition. On the contrary, it concerned an active memorizing process that engages the imagination and emotions to ruminate over content and make it one’s own. The original purpose of this art was to aid public speakers. But medieval monasticism transformed memory from an oratorical into a meditative art in the service of the “craft of making prayer continuously, which is the craft of monasticism, . . . constant meditation based on reading and recollecting sacred texts” (Carruthers 1998: 2).

Reading was to be done slowly, with frequent pauses, and charged with emotion (ideally, love; but one could begin with fear); words were not so much to be spoken as chewed; texts were to be savored on the tongue, to be assimilated into the mind much as food was assimilated into the body. Reading in this way was expected not simply to instruct but, rather, to transform the reader; it was the basis for creating the spiritual self, much as eating created the physical. Reading in this way was inextricably linked to meditation, and through meditation, to prayer, the former (at least originally) defined as a chewing of words or texts over and over until they became lodged in the memory and thus in the person . . . (Fulton: 156).

This process may also be conceptualized as transforming the verbal image in the text into a mental image in the mind and ultimately into a living image in the person of the reader/listener.

[7] But what about visual images? In an era renowned for its unsurpassed achievements in the realm of the visual arts, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) stands out for his disapproval of the “sculpted figures of beasts and monsters on capitals which the Cluniac monks, among others, had placed in their cloisters” because, he felt, they would have an adverse effect upon the monks’ making their own images internally, “*entirely* within the mind” (Carruthers 1998: 84-85).² Relying on “other people’s images” in order “to stimulate (or, worst of all, substitute for)” (Carruthers 1998: 87, 85) one’s own crafting of mental images through the imagination promoted spiritual laziness. But Bernard’s strictures did not prevail in the short or long term. Soon after his death, the Cistercian Order re-embraced images, in moderation (Carruthers 1998: 87). And more commonly, visual, verbal, and

founded, and offered guidelines for how they should be effectively utilized, while insisting that a vision beheld by the eyes of the soul transcends both visual and mental images, as it “comes with greater clarity than either of these” (Thompson: 806; see Wilson).

² By contrast, an early modern treatise on the art of memory would contend that “[i]t is useful to take pictures by good artists as memory images as these are more striking and move more than pictures by ordinary painters. For example, pictures by Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian, stay in memory” (Yates: 206).

mental images were seen as closely intertwined, as evidenced by influential works, such as illustrated versions of the fourteenth-century Franciscan *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, once attributed to St. Bonaventure (c. 1221-74). The *Meditations*' text-image structure aimed to assist the reader "to mentally picture the episodes [of Christ's life] imaginatively," and "to see herself in her mind's eye interacting with biblical figures and experiencing sacred history firsthand" (Flora: 87, 19).

[8] The interrelationship of visual, verbal, mental, and living images was taken for granted in the early modern era, and three examples of this phenomenon are particularly relevant to the present discussion. First, apropos of the imaginative, mental visualization techniques central to the *Spiritual Exercises*, Jesuit authors writing after St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), insist on the importance of visual images, such as those found in Jerome Nadal's *Images of Gospel History* of 1593 and *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels* of 1595, for "pinning down the imagination, which is . . . always liable to stray when constructing a mental image" (Dekoninck: 300). An equally significant point made by these authors is that the purpose of "Meditating on images is to become the image of what [is meditated upon]. . . We compose images to embody them, following the example of Christ, the True Image of God" (Dekoninck: 311).

[9] Secondly, with the rediscovery of classical antiquity in the Renaissance, the Roman poet Horace's famous dictum, *ut pictura poesis*, "as is painting so is poetry" – poetry here meaning all forms of writing – ruled supreme in early modern aesthetics. No less influential was the Greek poet Simonides' definition (sixth and fifth century B.C.E.) of painting as a "mute poem" and poetry as "a talking painting" (Montanari: 958-59)³ Discussion of these matters was commonplace in the circles in which Francis de Sales moved. Francis's spiritual and intellectual mentor at the University of Padua and lifelong friend, Antonio Possevino (1534-1611), one of the greatest teachers in Jesuit history, wrote a popular book on the Horatian topos: *Treatise on Poetry and Painting* (1594, with several editions thereafter), a copy of which he sent Francis.⁴ Another Jesuit admired by Francis, Louis Richeome (1544-1625), nicknamed the "French Cicero" because of his mastery of classical rhetoric, influentially restated Simonides's aphorism.⁵ Richeome assigns three meanings to the word "painting": first, "mute pictures," which are the work of painters and engravers and are designed for the

³ Of fundamental importance on the relationship between art and literature in the early modern era is Rensselaer W. Lee, who points out that while classical authors, such as Aristotle and Horace, suggest interesting analogies between poetry and painting, by no means did they tend to identify them as was done during the Renaissance and Baroque (5; see also Hagstrum: 3-128).

⁴ While Possevino first served the Church as a diplomat in Sweden and Russia, he found his true calling as a teacher in Padua, where he taught theology between 1587 and 1591. The *Tractatio de poesi et pictura* was excerpted from Possevino's encyclopedic *Bibliotheca selecta* (Rome, 1593), which was a compilation of important authors and texts for use in the curriculum in Jesuit schools, as well as of teaching and study methods (on Possevino and his work, see Donnelly; Bailey: 11-12, 48-49; on Francis's reception of the *Tractatio de poesi et pictura*, see de Sales 1892-1964: 11:123 [Lettre XLIX to Antoine Favre]).

⁵ One of the three most important Jesuit writers on the visual arts of the early modern era – the other two being Possevino and St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1601) (Bailey: 48-49), Richeome and his book, *La peinture spirituelle* (1611; *Spiritual Painting*) is referenced with approval and admiration by Francis in the preface to his masterwork, *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616) (see 1969: 337).

eye; second, “speaking pictures,” which are word-descriptions appealing to the ear that set before the mind’s eye a vivid image of the thing described; and allegory or mystery, which is designed to communicate a moral or mystical message (found in the preface to Richeome; see also Bremond: 1:91; Cave: 280; Bath: 252-53; Smith: 51-52; Mitchell: 180-81).

[10] But it is Richeome’s own books, which were illustrated by the finest engravers of the day, that allow us to glimpse the complexity of the relationship between “painting” and “speaking pictures.” The illustrations in Richeome’s books were sometimes thought by his contemporaries to fall short of the richness of the author’s meticulously conceived and detailed word-pictures (Bremond: 1:92). For example, in his preface to the reader, the printer of the 1619 English translation of Richeome’s book, *Holy Pictures of the Mystical Figures . . . of the Eucharist*, justifies his decision not to reproduce the illustrations of the French edition not simply for economic reasons, but, most especially, because Richeome’s verbal images are “so glorious, so liuely, and so compleate, as there is no need of the Pictures; which therefore, though easily perceived to be missing, can [in] no way be thought wanting by any iudicious Reader” (“The Printer to the Reader,” unnumbered page; see Mitchell: 180). This remarkable testimony highlights the keen competition between the sister arts, as well as the power of the imagistic language of the best literary artists and preachers.

[11] Thirdly, the 1603 Venice edition of Possevino’s *Treatise on Poetry and Painting* concludes with an enthusiastic endorsement (shared by many early modern Jesuits) of a new genre, the emblem, which epitomizes the *ut pictura poesis* tradition. An emblem is comprised of three elements: (1) an engraved picture (*pictura*); (2) a title or motto; and (3) a *subscriptio* in the form of a short epigram, biblical verse, simple rhymed couplet, or longer passage in prose. The key to deciphering the emblem’s meaning is the interaction of the *pictura* and the accompanying texts, especially the motto.

The emblem, invented by the Italian lawyer Andrea Alciato in 1531, can be seen as the ultimate attempt to blur the boundaries between the visual and the literary: word and image were to be combined in the emblem, a genre dedicated to achieving a balance between the two. . .

Together, the emblem’s textual part and its visual part were intended . . . to create an effect more powerful than that of either single component (Stronks: 219-20).

[12] The emblem became a staple of the pedagogy, preaching, and spirituality of the Jesuits, who are estimated to have produced 1,700 emblem books (500 first editions and 1,200 subsequent editions, issues, and translations) during the early modern era (see *Corpus Librorum Emblematum*). The Jesuits trained their students in the symbolic arts through the development of their imagination and memory, thereby fostering “the emblematic habit of mind” (Stopp: 34). More specifically, as students at Jesuit colleges, Francis de Sales and Gambart were schooled in the design and composition of emblems (Stopp: 34-35; Loach: 167-70).

Francis de Sales as Word Artist

[13] With the exception of engraved frontispieces, Francis de Sales’s published works were otherwise not illustrated. Nonetheless, his writings and sermons are filled with verbal

pictures or word-paintings. Francis excelled in composing such images – his ability to paint pictorially vivid images in the mind’s eye of his reader or listener resembled a painter’s recording them on canvas. And no one was more aware of this parallelism between the sister arts than Francis himself. Francis’s avowed purpose, in his best-selling book, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609), is to “paint upon the hearts of [God’s] people not only the common virtues but also His most dear and well-beloved devotion” (*Œuvres*: 27) – heart here understood both in its Biblical sense as a person’s life-center and as a common metaphor for memory (Ravier: 146; Göttler: 180). In the *Introduction’s* preface, Francis the author casts himself as the early modern counterpart of Apelles, who in the Renaissance was regarded as the greatest artist of classical antiquity. At the same time, this comparison serves to underscore Francis’s word artistry in an unexpected way, as none of Apelles’ paintings survive, and are known only by Pliny’s word descriptions, in the manner of Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* (1550, 1568), which “is a history of art without illustrations,” as Vasari “carefully describes countless paintings, many from memory, with verbal abundance” (de Armas: 13).

[14] Francis was not only a visual thinker, but he was also a visual communicator, believing that vivid imagery was the most effective means of getting his message across and impressing it on the memory of his reader or congregation. Francis’s word-pictures or paintings are enhanced by their frequent evocation of motifs from the visual arts with which his readers and audience would have been familiar. We now turn our attention to one such verbal picture. Then, we will consider how Gambart translates it into a visual image as the *pictura* of one of his emblems, while applying it to Francis himself and universalizing it as a depiction of the Salesian world of hearts.

[15] Besides the many roles already enumerated for which Francis was revered by his contemporaries, yet another may be added to the list: the pivotal role he played in St. Joseph’s “meteoric rise to prominence” in the French-speaking world in the early modern era (Ferguson: 1). One of Francis’s most important contributions was his sermon of 19 March 1622, “The Virtues of St. Joseph,” which became one of the most popular and widely disseminated ever preached on the saint.⁶ One of the most intriguing topics that Francis takes up in this sermon is St. Joseph’s sanctification. The saint’s growth in holiness flows from the

divine union between Our Lady and the glorious St. Joseph!, a union that made . . . Our Lord, belong to St. Joseph as He belonged to Our Lady. . . . who possessed all the virtues in so high a degree that no other pure creature can attain to it; however, . . . St. Joseph was the one who approached the nearest to it (1892-1964: 6:355; 2000: 111).

Mary

gained every day an increase in virtues and perfections, she derived from her most holy Son, who . . . caused the Holy Family in which He was, to be

⁶It was included in the posthumous edition of the *Spiritual Conferences* that Francis gave to the nascent Visitation Order: first published in 1629, there were at least ten editions between 1630 and 1645, and translations into all the major European languages during the seventeenth century – English (1632), Latin (1648), Italian (1652), German (1667), and Spanish (1667).

continually growing and advancing in perfection, Our Lady drawing her perfection from His divine Goodness, and St. Joseph receiving it, . . . through the mediation of Our Lady (1892-1964: 6:369; 2000: 124).

[16] To help his congregation better understand this mystery of the interior life of the Holy Family, Francis provides this word-picture:

Just as we see a mirror, placed opposite to the rays of the sun, receive its rays very perfectly, and another mirror, placed opposite to that which receives them, although the last mirror takes or receives the rays of the sun by reflection, it represents them so clearly that one can scarcely judge which mirror receives them directly from the sun, whether the one that is opposite the sun or the one that receives them only by reflection. So it was with Our Lady, who was like a very clear mirror opposite to the rays of the “Sun of justice” [Malachi 3:20], rays that poured into her soul all the virtues in their perfection, perfections and virtues that so perfectly reflected on St. Joseph, that it almost seemed that he was as perfect, and that he possessed the virtues in as high a degree, as the glorious Virgin . . . (1892-1964: 6:355-56; 2000: 112).

[17] Francis’s verbal image evokes a well-known visual image: the Virgin Mary as a *speculum sine macula*, mirror without blemish, whose source is the Old Testament Book of Wisdom 7:26: “For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of His goodness.” This Marian attribute was commonplace, from the early sixteenth century on, in engravings and paintings of the Immaculate Conception, which portray Mary as a young girl surrounded by attributes based on Old Testament verses that are considered to



Figure 1. Hieronymus Wierix (c. 1553-1619), *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (detail), engraving, late 16th century. Mary’s attribute of the *speculum sine macula* (mirror without blemish) is to the right, in the second medallion. Wierix’s rendering of the Immaculate Conception has an almost comic-booklike character: the Virgin is enveloped in a protective aureole, which is bordered by a squadron of cherubs with shields repelling arrows being launched by earthbound demons.

refer to her (figure 1). This genre is known as *Tota Pulchra*, “All beautiful,” derived from Song of Songs 4:7, *Tota Pulchra es*, “You are all beautiful.” “The symbolism of the spotless mirror meshes with the words ‘*tota pulchra es . . .*’: because Mary is without the spot or stain of original sin, she perfectly reflects the holiness of God” (Buffer and Horner: 193). Mary as the spotless mirror stands in stark contrast to another use of the mirror trope in medieval and early modern religious literature: the human person, who, as a result of sin, is a tarnished or broken mirror that can only imperfectly reflect the image of God and of Christ the exemplar of humanity (Jaeck-Woodgate).

[18] Francis integrates this Marian iconographic motif into the distinctive “universe of meaning” of Salesian spirituality. In a sermon of 1625 or 1626, John Donne famously observed: “GOD is *Love* and the *Holy Ghost* is amorous in his *Metaphors*” (quoted in Low: 65). Nowhere is this more so than in the Song of Songs, which “Jewish and Christian tradition . . . consistently read . . . as a dialogue of love between God and human beings” (Ceresko: 36). As a student in Paris, Francis was captivated by the Song’s amorous metaphors, and from his meditative rumination on them, Francis created a “universe of meaning” (Ceresko: 32, who adopted this phrase from Murphy: 26) in which the reciprocal divine-human love relationship is imaged as a mutual breathing and beating of hearts: an interconnected world of hearts that is both vertical (human hearts, created in the divine image and likeness, breathing and beating in union with the divine Heart) and horizontal (human hearts pulsing in union with one another). As a result of sin, however, the human heart does not always beat in harmony with the Heart of God. It is through appropriation and imitation of the particular virtues of the Heart of the God-man Jesus revealed in Matthew 11:29 – humility before God and gentleness toward neighbor – that the human heart comes to pulse again in union with the divine Heart (Wright 2004a: 32-34).

[19] The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph has been described as being “in miniature an image of the Salesian world of hearts” (Wright 2004a: 55). “Mary was the one human being, besides her divine-human son, whose heart, preserved from sin, beat most closely with God. Her preservation (Immaculate Conception) meant that she was free to love fully, with all the expansiveness of which human beings are capable” (Wright 2004b: 153). By its very nature, divine love is ecstatic and communicative, and Francis envisions the divine action in salvation history as a lover’s visitation that is transformative (Wright 2004a: 53). The first person visited and transformed by the mystery of the Incarnation is Mary. Because she “bore Love Itself in her womb,” Mary “not only possessed charity, but she had also received it in such plenitude that she was charity itself. She had conceived Him who, being all love, had transformed her into love itself” (de Sales 1892-1964: 159, 161). While Jesus was in Mary’s womb, His heart rested directly beneath Mary’s heart, which was thus aligned with Jesus’s own (Wright 2004b: 154).

[20] In Salesian thought, St. Joseph was the next person to be transformed by the Redeemer in the womb, whose heart beat with love for Joseph and drew forth the saint’s love. Francis composes this word-picture of this transformative moment: Joseph accompanies Mary on her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, and on the journey the unborn Jesus in Mary’s womb pierces Joseph’s heart with rays or arrows of love. The divine Cupid *in utero* thus sets in motion the trajectory of Joseph’s martyrdom of love in the service of His infancy and hidden life that culminates, when the saint’s mission is completed, with Joseph dying of love and

subsequently being bodily assumed into heaven as an expression of Jesus's filial gratitude for Joseph's paternal love and service (de Sales 1969: 333, 702-703; 1892-1964: 6:369-70; see also Chorpenning 2010, 2011).

[21] Francis conveys the union of Joseph's heart with the Heart of God and of Jesus in several ways. According to Francis, the identification of Joseph in Matthew 1:19 as a "just man" means that "he always had his will adjusted, united, and conformed to that of God" (1892-1964: 6:368; 2000: 122). Francis offers many examples of Joseph's practice of the particular virtues of Jesus's divine Heart: humility and gentleness (1892-1964: 6:358-64; 2000: 114-19). Finally, for Francis, Joseph was the surrogate, having the place, of God the Father on earth, being "entrusted with [God's] family and ruling the Son of God and Mother of God" (1892-1964: 8:88; 2000: 68).

[22] Francis's word-picture of the "reverberation" (1892-1964: 6:363; 2000: 119) that Mary's virtues made upon Joseph might itself be regarded as a symbolic exegesis of the extraordinary word-picture Francis draws of the privileged relationship that commences between Jesus in Mary's womb and Joseph in route to the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah. More than four decades later, Gambart gives Francis's verbal image graphic expression in an emblem designed to depict symbolically Francis himself, who was a living image of Christ who was the image of the invisible God.



Figure 2. Guillaume Collaert (c. 1610-66), picture ("I was sick and tormented, twisting and turning in my chain" [*Confessions*, Book 8, chapter 11]) of Emblem V, in Michel Hoyer, O.E.S.A., *Flammulae amoris S. P. Augustini versibus et iconibus exornatae . . .* (Antwerp, 1629).

Gambart as Emblem Artist

[23] Gambart's *Life of St. Francis de Sales in Symbols* is considered by modern scholars as "one of the most visually attractive" of emblem books (Adams: 275). Its *picturae* are the work of Albert Flamen, one of the best Flemish engravers of the day. Emblem books of saints often use a narrative or biographical form to depict a saint's life, with the person of the saint appearing in the *pictura*. For example, in the Augustinian Hermit Michel Hoyer's emblem book of the life of St. Augustine, *Sparkles of Divine Love*, of 1629, twenty-five emblems chronicle Augustine's remarkable career from sinner to saint (figure 2). Gambart, however, employs the symbolic form, reinterpreting commonplace emblem *picturae*, as well as images from Francis's own writings, to represent events in the saint's life and his virtues.

[24] In the dedicatory letter to his emblem book, Gambart emphasizes that his method is faithful to the saint himself, who constantly uses images as "veils" and "symbols" for the truths and virtues he teaches, and pays homage to Francis's symbolic way of thinking that permeates his sermons and writings. Further, Gambart avers, Francis's manner of instructing through images casts into relief his imitation of Christ, who, in His preaching and teaching, modeled and licensed the use of images and similitudes for "under the names of the most familiar and common things, [He] revealed Himself, and His most sublime virtues to humankind."⁷

[25] Gambart intended his emblem book to be used by the Visitandine nuns as a meditation manual: there are fifty-two emblems – one for each week of

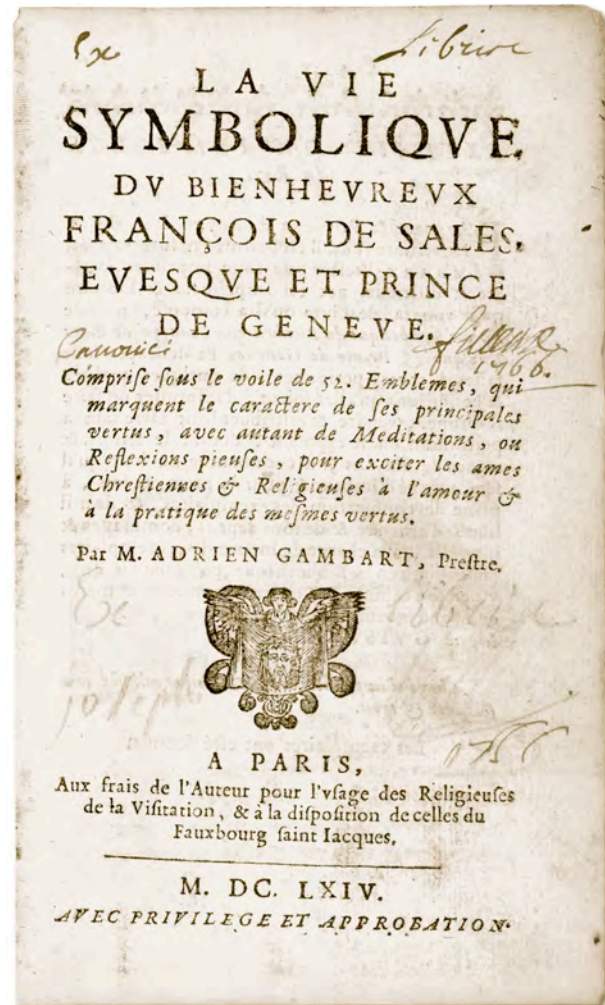


Figure 3. Adrien Gambart, *La vie symbolique du bienheureux François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève, comprise sous le voile de 52 emblèmes . . .* (Paris, 1664), title page.

⁷ The distinction between the narrative or biographical method and the symbolic or allegorical in emblem books of saints is made by Guiderdoni-Bruslé 2005: 15-16, 21-31; 2006. In another context, a similar distinction has recently been suggested by Walter S. Melion, who contrasts the historical images based on the Gospels in Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (1595) with the symbolic or allegorical images of Jan David's *Veridicus christianus* (1601), Louis Richeome's *Tableaux sacrez des figures mystiques . . . de l'Eucharistie* (1601), and Antoine Sucquet's *Via vita aeternae* (1620) (153).

the year – explained by a meditation that is then followed by seven points for prayer and action – one for each day of the week. In the course of the year, the sisters would meditate at length and in depth on the important episodes of Francis’s life and his principal virtues, with a view to internalizing and appropriating these so as to fashion themselves into living images of their saintly founder. Gambart’s emblems were to be inscribed or painted on the heart and memory of the Visitandine who beheld them so that she becomes what she meditates upon.

[26] During his lifetime, Francis was deemed by his contemporaries to be “a living image on which the Son of God was painted” and “many people . . . in seeing him, . . . seemed to see Our Lord on earth” (Chantal: 2:310). Likewise, the Visitandines were to achieve the imitation of Christ through the imitation of Francis de Sales. It is no accident that the title page of Gambart’s emblem book is illustrated by an engraving of Veronica’s veil, which was understood to be both a “true image” and a living image of the Savior (figure 3). As Richeome explains in his *Three Essays on the Catholic Faith, Saints, and Images* of 1597, the organic fibers of the cloth on which this image was fixed, the sweat and blood that impregnate them, make it a “living image” that was drawn from the body of Christ (Fumaroli: 88). Thus, the leitmotif of Gambart’s book is signaled at the outset: Francis was a true and living image of the Son of God; in the person of Francis, the face of the gentle and humble Jesus was glimpsed.

[27] Turning now to Emblem XXXI (figure 4): Gambart adapts and reworks Francis’s verbal image of the Virgin as an unblemished mirror who reflects the rays of her divine Son’s holiness onto her spouse St. Joseph into the visual image of a concave mirror (i.e., magnifying glass) in the shape of a heart that receives the rays of the Sun of Justice and reflects them so as to kindle and enflame other hearts. The emblem’s meaning is revealed by a series of accompanying texts, which progress from the general to the specific. The motto:



Figure 4. Albert Flamen, Emblem XXXI, in Adrien Gambart, *La vie symbolique du bienheureux François de Sales, evesque et prince de Genève, comprise sous le voile de 52 emblèmes . . .* (Paris, 1664).

Acceptas refero flammam, “I pass on the fire I receive.” The title, which identifies Francis as the emblem’s referent: “His zealous love, outgoing to all.” The verse epigram, which is put in Francis’s mouth: “Having received from Heaven both fire and flames, I wish to dispense them lovingly to souls.” The prose commentary/meditation fully develops these themes (Gambart: 111).

[28] In an implicit *imitatio Mariae* (imitation of Mary), Francis’s heart was a clear mirror – emptied of self-love and self-conceit, unclouded by the fog of the passions – that made him a cooperator in the diffusive dynamic of divine love of which Jesus speaks in Luke 12:49: “I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were kindled!” Francis’s heart, filled with and reflecting the fire of divine love, sets other hearts afire with love of God through his sermons, letters, books, and personal example (Gambart: facsimile, 121-22). In visualizing this facet of Francis’s life and ministry, Gambart’s emblem likewise images the Salesian world of hearts by bringing together several elements: Francis’s trope of the two mirrors that receive the sun’s rays – one directly and the other by reflection; Francis as the receptor and reflector of divine love; and the saint’s definition and word-picture of

spiritual friendship, by which two or three or more souls communicate to one another their devotion, their spiritual affections, and make themselves have but one spirit. . . . Yes, for the delicious balm of devotion distills out of one heart into another by a continual sharing that it can be said that “God has poured out” upon this friendship “His blessing and life for evermore” [Psalm 132:4] (de Sales 1969: 184).

The goal of the Visitandine’s meditation on this emblem was that she make her heart not only “concave and luminous in itself, but reflective and capable of reflecting to others by sharing its light and the good example of her virtues” (Gambart: facsimile, 123), in imitation of Francis.

Conclusion

[29] Visual, verbal, mental, and living images were inseparable in early modern Catholicism. Verbal pictures or word-paintings, which often evoke and/or draw on visual images familiar to his readers and listeners, are ubiquitous in the sermons and writings of St. Francis de Sales. Francis excelled in painting pictorially vivid images in the mind’s eye of his reader or congregation, with a view to their becoming lodged in the memory and thus in the person, who was to become a living image.

[30] Likewise, these four kinds of images are in constant play in Gambart’s emblem book. Gambart exhibits an impressive command of Francis’s writings and thought. But he is no slavish interpreter, as he frequently tweaks and adapts Francis’s original meaning to his own purposes. On the eve of Francis’s canonization, Gambart aims to portray the new saint as the embodiment of the spiritual doctrine he teaches in his letters, sermons, and books in a way that casts into relief that, like his patron saint, Francis of Assisi, he was also an *alter Christus* (see van Os; Mundy), another Christ – a point amply testified to by Francis’s contemporaries in the canonical process for his canonization. With its easy-to-follow steps and bite-size morsels of material for ruminative meditation, Gambart’s emblem book is

simultaneously a “how to” manual for the Visitandine Order’s self-fashioning into the living image of Francis de Sales, who was a true image of the Savior on earth.

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