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Imago Figurata

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EMBLEMATA SACRA

**RHÉTORIQUE ET HERMÉNEUTIQUE DU DISCOURS
SACRÉ DANS LA LITTÉRATURE EN IMAGES**

**THE RHETORIC AND HERMENEUTICS OF ILLUSTRATED
SACRED DISCOURSE**

Textes édités
par Ralph Dekoninck et Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé



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Studies Vol. 7**

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Foreword

The present volume of essays, *Emblemata Sacra. The Rhetoric and Hermeneutics of Illustrated Sacred Discourse*, follows a conference that took place in January 2005 in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, thanks to the close collaboration between the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Literature Department) and the Université Catholique de Louvain (the research group 'Figures et formes de la spiritualité dans la littérature et les expressions artistiques').¹ With nearly 50 papers presented, the scope of the conference was wide in terms of the nature of the studied material, as well as its geographical and historical origins, but the conference consistently focused on the relationship between Christian sacred discourse and images. All the essays of this volume come from selected and reworked papers of the conference, and they all explore in their own way the problematic combination of text and image as used in a Christian discursive context, either spiritual, theological, didactic, moral or political.

As will soon be obvious, we have understood 'Sacred emblematics' in a broad sense, as a mode of discourse using figurative and symbolic forms to decipher the images of the divine Creation, and not strictly as a literary genre. Moreover, we have also fully understood it in the perspective of the 'emblematic process', as described by Daniel Russell.² Thus, many essays venture well beyond the boundary of the emblem genre, to open new perspectives on the use of a figurative process, engaging the reader and beholder in a hermeneutical quest – both visual and verbal exegesis. Illustrated sacred discourse elaborates a figurative rhetoric, which accounts for an initial exegetical approach: the interpretative quest for God within the symbolic images of the Creation and the Sacred Scriptures becomes a figurative and symbolic representation of the quest itself. From this point of view, the dynamic relationship between sacred discourse and its images, and in particular the functioning of spiritual images, can be qualified as an emblematic process.

The 38 essays have been organised in seven sections. The first section ('Historical and methodological issues') presents methodological bases for the study of emblematics and spiritual images, as well as the elements necessary for the Christian contextualisation of the corpus. The second section ('Exegesis of the Scriptures and the Creation'), complementary to the first section, is devoted to exegetical processes developed in different contexts and seeks to emphasise the correspondence between the exegesis of Sacred Scriptures and the exegesis of the Creation, which are the two central symbolisms in Christianity. The third section ('The image *in absentia*')

¹ We would like to thank most sincerely our colleagues Marc Van Vaeck (K.U.Leuven) and Myriam Wathee-Delmotte (F.N.R.S. - UCL) with whom we made an efficient team to organise this conference. We also want to express our deepest gratitude to Sandrine Lely, Peter Daly and Karel Porteman for their time and precious help in the making of this volume.

² *Emblematic Structures in Renaissance French Culture* (Toronto, 1995).