

## IMAGES, NATURE AND ETHICS

The *Imprese sacre*, composed by the theatin Paolo Aresi and published from 1615 to 1635 in seven volumes, are one of the most interesting examples of the results of the Renaissance emblematic tradition which represents, as Freedberg has said, ‘the first great age of the visual encyclopedia” (Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx*, p. 3). The production of texts with images continued abundantly throughout the seventeenth century, based on the assumption that a link exists between real images and mental images. Underlying this assumption were, on one side, the neoplatonic and ficinian principles that symbolic images represent the universal of the world of ideas, and on the other, the aristotelian rhetorical statement that regards emblems as the perfect metaphorical invention. The first attitude is exemplified in the *Icones symbolicae* by Cristoforo Giarda, in which he states that symbolic forms are a means used by celestial creatures to make themselves visible to mankind, to help human beings, to educate them, and to show the perfection of superior creatures. The second one is well represented by the *Trattato delle imprese (Idea delle perfette imprese)* by Emanuele Tesauro who supports the idea that symbolic images are the most perfect form of the metaphor.

In any case, both sides are convinced that images function in learning and can be used for communication purposes in a more effective way than words can. Even Galileo, in the prefatory letter of the *Sidereus nuncius*, supports the value of images in attaining knowledge, saying that the condition of the human mind is such that images of things, which enter continuously into the human mind, help memory. Galileo’s assumption is based on the Renaissance conception

of 'psychologie', founded on aristotelian and scholastic thinking, which considers memory as a type of storehouse where the sensible forms that the *sensus communis* has collected and distributed are retained. From these ancient theories Galileo also deduces that memory subsists on visible forms, which underlies the principle of mnemotechnics. Images are important not only for memory, but also for thinking and opening the mind to new knowledge. The scientist himself demonstrates the importance of images, not only in adorning his works with illustrations to which he devoted much attention, but also in inventing emblems for the Medici.

Symbolic images, which were widely used in decorations and book illustrations, were considered effective especially because they allowed a perception that overcome the representation. They were considered capable of expressing directly the deep meaning of things, or the essential part of a message. Hence, the use of symbolic images became common and frequent even in XVIIth century spirituality. Ecclesiastics took advantage of the ease provided by printing techniques in order to reach the largest congregation in their educational efforts. The Jesuits' use of *luoghi mentali* and the attention devoted to churches' decorations and art are well known. Sacred emblems became an even more widespread way of working at forming interiority. Emblems provide a metaphor revealed by a visual and literary context, they are readable via a web of interrelated meanings, which enriches the message. The symbolic image also became a way of organizing a public speech, not only because preachers found in it a way of memorizing a sermon, but mainly because symbolic images represented a means for the auditors to memorize what they had listened to.

The *Imprese sacre* represent an articulated cultural joint of the first half of XVIIth century. They were translated into Latin and were circulated widely in

Italy and Europe. We know that they were present in the libraries of the Italian orders devoted to sermonizing, that they influenced the artistic creation (the decoration of the churches of the Sacro Monte di Varallo and of the Hergiswald in Switzerland reproduce some of these *imprese sacre*), and that they have been used by preachers in their sermons, as we can see in the sermons of the dominican Tommaso Bracchi and of the capuchin Michelangelo Cassina. Moreover, they were frequently quoted by Filippo Picinelli in his *Mondo simbolico* (1653) and well considered by Menestrier in his *Philosophie de l'image* (1682). Even the *Museo o galeria adunata dal sapere e dallo studio di Manfredo Settala* (one of the books of the Italian *Wunderkammern*) mentions this work for its description of the pieces collected.

The *Imprese sacre* were devoted to preachers, they represent a support for making sermons. From the Middle Ages on, there was a large production of books on sermon composition. They were based on the sacred scriptures, on exegetical and Patristic texts, on theology, and on logical topics. With their complex tables of content, they offered material ready for adjustment and use in a speech. Even if they represented a controversial issue, because it was generally stated that the preacher should receive his invention only by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these books were considered at the time the most useful instruments to supply a lack of holy inspiration. They responded especially to the needs of the time. In fact, XVIIth Century Catholic preaching could not deal with the Bible, because of the censorship imposed on any biblical translation of since 1594. The Bible had to be quoted in Latin and preachers were urged to avoid controversial issues which were supposed to be a cause of the congregation being led astray. And moreover, Catholic orthodoxy believed that the Bible should pass to the congregation only through the filter of a priest.

Thus, a sermon, having to stay within the dogmas, that could not be discussed, had evidently a strong cohesive character. In order to respond to the needs of a sophisticated audience, preachers developed sophisticated techniques of communication. Not only did they draw abundantly from classical treatises on oratory and from literature (Ovid seems to be quoted more often than the Bible), but also they used their means, such as voice, action, and memory in a new way. XVIIth century preachers developed new kind of experimental communication, in order to convey an interesting and memorable message.

A preacher then was not the priest preaching every Sunday in his parish. He was a learned, cultivated person, well-prepared with rhetorical devices, devoted to preaching only during the liturgical period of Advent and Lent or during special feast days or events. Choosing a preacher for Lent was a serious matter in Catholic cities (since the Middle Ages); the best preachers were contended and exhibited. There were more or less seven hundred preachers in Italy at the time. A good preacher could be argued over by the main cities, and his fame could last for years. Panigarola's way of preaching was still the object of discussion thirty years after his death.

Even Galileo's case demonstrates how important the preacher was. It is well known that his problems started with a sermon preached on All Saints' Day, the first of November 1612, in San Marco in Florence by the Dominican friar Tomaso Caccini, whose ideas were further promoted by another Dominican, Niccolò Lorini, who again preached against the "diabolic" art of mathematicis on the first Sunday of Advent in November 1614. Eventually Lorini denounced Galileo to the Sant'Uffizio, despite the fact that many of the Dominicans in Florence openly stated their disappointment with Caccini's and Lorini's acts.

The orders most involved in preaching at the time were the old ones, such as the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Carmelites, as well as the newer ones, such as the Jesuits, Capuchins, Theatins, Barnabites, and Oratorians. Generally, a well-received sermon (or collection of sermons) was immediately published, and circulated widely. The sermon became a popular literary genre, which considered the audience's satisfaction its main aim. Hence, with its attention to the readers' tastes, to their pleasure and satisfaction, it represents very well the Baroque. The fact that Torquato Tasso expressed in his letters the wish to be considered a preacher because of his poem, the *Gerusalemme Conquistata*, and that Marino wrote three sermons, the *Dicerie sacre*, which were printed in 23 editions within the span of fifty years, are clear signs of the importance of the preacher in that cultural and literary ambience.

It is not easy to trace the earliest origins of preaching in the form of an *impresa*, as we are dealing with an art form that ends in a publically performed, and thus impermanent acts. But as the printed material witness, we are lead to Torino, to the Sermon on the Shroud in 1608. The Savoia family was very involved in religious life since this was an aspect of their political skills. Preaching became for them the main instrument for containing Roman pressure to fight against the protestants (calvinists and valdesians) many of whom inhabited the small Duchy at the time. The Duke, Carlo Emanuele I, preferred to fight with words than with swords. And considering the problems represented by protestants living in a small Catholic territory, we can say that his choice was quite successfull. He gave to the Capuchins (and not to the Jesuits, as Rome advised) the duty to convert the Valdesians. No Valdesian territory had been entirely converted, but no serious repression against them had risen. The best preachers of the time were invited to preach in Torino, such as Francesco Panigarola, Francois de Sales, Daniello Bartoli, and Paolo Segneri. The Dukes were

especially concerned about preaching concerning the Shroud, the most important relic belonging to the Duchy, and the icon of its faith to Christian Catholic dogma.

In 1608 the dominican friar Camillo Balliani preached a sermon for the feast of the Shroud in which he used a metaphor of the Shroud as a book where Christ wrote with his blood words of salvation. The entire sermon is constructed from elements of this metaphor. At the time, Marino was in Turin, and would have had the chance to listen to the sermon. It may have been a source of inspiration for his three *Dicerie sacre*, written in Torino during these years and published in Venice in 1614. The three sermons are structured around a central metaphorical motif: The order of San Maurizio e Lazzaro as the sky, the seven worlds Christ pronounced being on the Cross as music (a theme that extends from Renaissance theologians to Baroque music composers), and the Shroud as a picture.

When Marino published his *Dicerie*, he declared that they were a novelty, but at the time we have already other witnesses to this kind of preaching structured around a central metaphor. Precisely Paolo Aresi, who had been invited by Federico Borromeo to preach in Milan for the canonization of San Carlo on November 1610, organized his long speech according to one image: a thunderbolt, or rather, a picture of a thunderbolt, from its origin to its manifestation. In it, San Carlo's life and virtues are compared to atmospherical phenoma considered in all its characteristics: mythological, naturalistic, and literary.

The oration delivered before an immense congregation in the Milan Duomo in 1610 represents the saint as a flash of lightning; the beginning is given by a biblical verse, Ez. I, 14, that also represents the recurrent motto, a leit-motif underlying the most important passages: «Ibant et revertebantur in similitudinem

fulguris corruscantis» (they ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning).

The lightning takes its origin from the earth, because it is nothing other than an earthly exhalation, as soon as it is touched by the sun's rays, it rises from the earth and flies without wings, [...] becoming stronger, it moves against the clouds, agitates and turns, so that it warms up and, once warmed up it inflames [...] and finally becomes perfect lightning [...]. (Aresi, *Orazione per san Carlo*, p. 10)

The saint's life is then told according to each section of this representation, with a richness of hagiographical information, theological considerations, and moral directives. The exhalation is Carlo's childhood, the ascension to the sky is his ardent adolescence, the clouds are the temptations of worldly honors, the flames are his election as bishop, etc. The sermon exalts Charles' virtues, but the similies helps to recall and memorize them. It is a mnemonic technique, but it is also a way of talking about phenomena still largely attributed to obscure and magical causes.

Born in Cremona to a noble milanese family in 1574, Cesare Aresi entered the congregation of the Theatines at an early age taking the name of Paolo (the preacher for excellence in Christian history). He became a professor of philosophy in Naples and Rome, highly praised for his thorough doctrine. As supervisor of the Theatins' institutions he traveled in South and North Italy. In 1620 he was appointed Bishop of Tortona. He lived in his diocese for the rest of his life and died in there 1644.

In the same year, 1610, when he preached for the San Carlo celebration in Milan, he announced in his rhetorical treatise, *Arte di predicar bene*, published in Venice, that he intended to work on a new project for sermon writing:

We are thinking about preparing a book of scriptural emblems, in which the truest rules of this art will be respected. We will take either the *corpo* or the *motto*, that is to say either the image or the words, from the Holy Scriptures, and they will mainly be the words of Christ, and the image will be either from natural things or artificial ones. This will be done to represent saints, just men and sinners. To each we will add a short explanation in verses and in prose; then we will prepare a *discorso* about the most delightful and curious things that we can say about the image; and we will obtain spiritual doctrine for our soul and finally, when speaking of the words of the Scriptures, we will explain them literally and morally, creating concepts which will be useful for sermons. (Aresi, *Arte di predicar bene*, p. 828)

These lines contain the plan of Aresi's huge emblematic project. Every emblem, built with image and words (*motto*), is in fact followed by a poetic inscription and a long discourse explaining the image, giving its moral application, and finally offering scriptural hints and philosophical additions related to the topic.

Thus Aresi constructed one of the greatest homiletic repertoires: the *Imprese sacre*, in six volumes, for a total of five thousand pages circa, of preachable suggestions organized according to emblems. Aresi worked at this project for twenty years, so many years passed between the publication of the first volume in 1615, including a treatise on emblem making, and the publication of the sixth and last volume in 1635. It contains a collection of two hundred emblems regarding God, the Holy Virgin, the saints, the virtuous, and the vicious, with moral and spiritual teaching.

Aresi appears as a priest who is quite original in his judgements, faithful to the dogma and sacraments, with great consideration for knowledge, learning, and curiosity, which he considers a means for completing the creation and overcoming the deficiencies caused by original sin. In his pages the largest space is devoted to the spiritual «discorsi», but the main novelty of the work is

represented by the first speeches, «discorsi primi», on the «corpo» of the emblems. They are the part with which we are most concerned here, because this is the place where Aresi collects the “most delightful and curious things” which can be said on that “corpo” (=image). The «corpi» are drawn from the natural world (animals, plants, physical phenomena) and from the human artifacts. In giving these curious bits of information, which may be useful to preachers, he collects all the knowledge on each subject from classical tradition and modern learning, also including the new discoveries.

The «discorsi primi» are composed according to the ‘scientific’ rhetoric of the time as it appears in Aldrovandi's descriptions. Everything known is included. Aresi's method can be described with the very same words used by Thorndike speaking of Aldrovandi's description of the eagle.

He quotes every passage in the Greek and Latin poets, and even a modern like Ariosto, where an eagle is mentioned, every myth where it is concerned like that of Jupiter and Ganymede, every story, fable and anecdote about eagles that is known to him, their use in pagan rites and augury and auspices, their employment as hieroglyphs and emblems. [...] Aldrovandi further lists synonyms and gives the etymology of the name of the bird; goes into things with similar names or names derived from it; and enumerates various men, rivers and towns that have been called Aquila, not to mention an eagle fish, eagle herb, eagle star, or the use by alchemists of the word for a chemical. (THORNDIKE, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 278)

Aresi's description of the bird of paradise, for example, generates the occasion to talk about the Moluccan Islands, and then of Islam and the symbolism of this bird as a representation of life in heaven for Muslims. Learning means reconstructing the complex web of associations which links history and nature, poetry and knowledge. Aresi's sources are above all ancient: Aristotle, Pliny, Seneca, Plutarch, Elianus, Atheneus, Galenus, Dioscorides, Columella, etc.

With these he associates medieval *auctores*: Albertus Magnus, Vincent of Beauvais, the *Physiologus*, etc. with the moderns from all Europe: Gesner, Bellon, Rondelet, Ruel, Aldrovandi, Cardano, Estienne, Cesalpino, etc. Very often he uses the geographers, ancient and modern, and the travel reports from the New World and from the areas of recent frequentation. Aresi seems to pass over real expertise on the treatises concerning medical herbs of recent discovery.

If we consider his project in its totality, it appears as an *arbor scientiarum*, in which all branches of knowledge communicate in order to reveal to human beings the hidden presence of God in the world. God, known only *per speculum in aenigmate* (1 *Corinthians* 13:12), reveals himself through the book of nature, open, if one wants to understand, even to the illiterate.

The divine order is stamped *ab origine* in all beings. It is an order that even sacred books, filtered by human minds, cannot transmit in such a direct way as created things can. As the *Liber sapientiae* states: “a magnitudine enim speciei et creaturae cognoscibiliter poterit horum creator videri” (Sap. 13: 5). Aresi bases his principles on an analogical vision of nature still largely present in culture at the time. Natural knowledge for the preacher should be directed to the discovery and the revelation of eternal laws and of the image of God in things. For this reason, according to Aresi, knowledge must have no limits:

Science, which aims at truth, is not the enemy of virtue which concerns the good [...]. God is the author of science, because He gave it to human beings and the devil only falsely promised it; consequently, insisting that science is an incentive to evil would mean making God the author of sin, and that is, to commit a horrible act of blasphemy. (Aresi, *Imprese sacre*, VI, ii, p. 869)

Far from condemning the investigation of the secrets of nature, as we have seen in the preaching of the florentine Dominicans against Galileo, Aresi encourages it, because learning is a way of overcoming superstition and of

nourishing faith: learning helps human happiness "because happiness", he says, "consists especially in the knowledge and contemplation of God and of the secrets of nature". This is quite an unusual attitude in a period when attempts to penetrate the secrets of nature could easily be interpreted as going beyond the limit of rightful curiosity.

In Aresi's choices do we see a characteristic of his order, a personal attitude, or the result of the time in which he lived? Probably all aspects. The Theatin order was especially open to learning and promoted studies, as did the Jesuit order and other post-Tridentine orders, such as the Oratorians. Aresi proceeds with a clear consciousness of the positive effects of the sciences: they are good for spiritual life, permit knowledge of God *per speculum*, and eventually help human beings in their earthly life, because they make the infinite secrets of nature, which deserve to be admired and available. They enrich human beings with the knowledge of thousands of inventions.

At the end of the sixth volume, written in 1630, during the dark years of the plague, Aresi inserted a recipe for an antidote. And moreover, to enrich his epitome, he added seventeen digressions on topics of primary interest at the time, some more traditional such as «Sulla fisiognomia», on physiognomy (*Imprese*, III, pp. 889-896), «Se animale alcuno o generarsi o lungamente conservarsi nel fuoco possa», on whether animals can generate fire or live for long in it (*Imprese*, VI, ii, pp. 457-465); «se sia bene il cavar sangue a un malato», on whether it is correct to draw blood from a ill person, and other more current issues such as: «Sopra i moti de la luna», on the movements of the Moon (*Imprese*, IV, ii, pp. 1407-1016); «Delle stelle nuovamente apparse in cielo», on newly discovered stars in the sky (*Imprese*, V, pp. 22-37); «Se la terra stia ferma et immobile nel mezzo del mondo, o pure intorno il centro di lui si muova e continuamente in se stessa si aggiri», on whether the Earth is still and

immobile in the center of the world, or if moves around its own center and continuously turns on itself (*Imprese*, VI, ii, pp. 862-893). In the astronomical «digressioni» he quotes the main scholars of his day: Clavius, Brahe, Galilei, Kepler, Sacco, Zabarella, etc.

We could not have expected a statement in favour of Copernicanism from Aresi, publishing in 1635, but his long digression on the topic, and the way he concludes, seems to suggest a kind of reluctance to deny theories he regarded with sympathy before the condemnation. His conclusion ends in a utterly non-convincing way: with language clearly referring to the case of Galileo and to the sympathy that the *Accademia dei Lincei* accorded to him, Aresi accuses the Copernicans of being interested in the new theories only for personal glory and leaves aside any trace of heretical accusation.

But what kind of use could be made of the *Imprese*? Was this learning really divulged to the congregation in the form of homilies? The success they enjoyed testifies that they had a kind of practical use; amongst the enormous quantity of written and printed matter in collections of seventeenth century sermons and preaching repertories we could find sermons which follow this model, which quote or avoid mentioning Aresi's name.

What happened in other orders involved with preaching? We have presented one preacher and one order, certainly in the vanguard of the spiritual and cultural renewal of the post-Tridentine Church, but even a superficial consideration of the way the Jesuits used the sciences in their missions in China would be sufficient proof of a mental attitude open to learning, its use, and its divulgation. Concerning Jesuit expertise in natural history, mathematics, and astronomy, little need be said. Was this knowledge used in preaching? What passed from the pulpit to the congregation of the experiences undergone by Jesuits in their collection of and progress in learning?

Jesuits and Theatines were the most advanced in the praise and diffusion of learning. But no less open to natural curiosity is the orator Antonio Glielmo in his collection of homilies *Delle grandezza della santissima Trinità*, published in 1643. Glielmo's purpose is to bring to the divine word an everyday aspect; he employs natural beings in order to draw the believers attention to the evidence of a mysterious entity which cannot be known rationally. Also Glielmo, as we have already seen for Aresi, submits all elements to religious symbolism and creates analogies between creatures and God with similarities to be decoded:

I wanted to resume briefly the doctrine of these books so that you open your eyes in order to learn to think about each little creature, to see reflected in it the greatness of the Creator. You must be aware that this is a way of learning mental oration without effort or study or brain exertion because there is no man, for ignorant he may be, that looking at a flower or to a bird or the sky he cannot clearly discern the power, wisdom and goodness of God which in every little thing wonderfully shines.

Glielmo continues and transmits the teaching of the founder of his order, Saint Filippo Neri. The infinitely small seen through the lense of a microscope, the experience of which he relates, enables us to learn of the infinitely great. He also seems animated by a strong interest in all sciences: mathematics, astronomy, anatomy, etc. which he translates into symbolic discourses. For the anatomy of the human eye he offers a meticulous description with specific reference to the testimony of anatomists.

He devotes attention to the physiology of the eye:

[God] pulled two very delicate nerves from the brain to the eyes and called them optical nerves. These join in the inferior part near the place we call Common Sense and then exit one in the right eye, the other in the left one [...] the act of seeing starts in the pupils and ends in the fork of those nerves, that is to say in the part where they are unified.

In this way, discoveries in the field of anatomy, which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had greatly increased, radically changing the knowledge of human physiology, entered into the world of preaching.

One may think that the attitude of the Dominicans, for example, would have been different. They had been entrusted with the defense of the dogma by means of the Inquisition. Nevertheless, even the treatise *Condottier de' predicatori*, written by the Dominican Maurizio de' Gregori and printed in 1627, is aligned to this trend towards the exploration of the natural world and suggests the use in sermons of material from all disciplines, including the natural sciences. The book of De Gregori is a kind of small encyclopedia for preaching; it reviews the history of preaching, from the origin of the world to his time, and it deals with sermon composition, offering a bibliography of sacred history, explaining mnemotechniques and discussing the method used in the examination of preachers. As far as preachable matter is concerned, he suggests using first the Bible and the *Summa theologica*. Then, as a way of increasing the interest and the effectiveness of homilies, he deals with ethics, politics, civil and religious canons, medicine, mathematics, perspective, natural philosophy, physics, logic, mineralogy, *parva naturalia*, physiognomy, and natural marvels. He accepts all learning with the exclusion of divinations. He explains how to draw concepts from the Old and New Testament; one chapter is devoted to symbols. Then he returns to the sciences: cosmography, geography, topography, and other «cose curiose e degne».

It is significant that his treatise does not treat the area of strict rhetoric and elegance of eloquence in order to find, even though by means of metaphorical artifice, a kind of link with the reality. Thus, natural things enter the oratorical practice in a more complex way than traditional poetical description or exemplary literature.

All of the books we have considered so far belong to the period before 1633; we suppose that the second, definitive condemnation of Copernicanism left no chance for new learning to attempt an enlargement of Catholic spirituality. Certainly some ecclesiastics in favour of popular instruction and of peaceful and curious research into the mysteries of creation had favoured this trend. They acted in accordance with humanistic syncretism and seized the best of the successful early part of the scientific revolution. In the middle of the century, the most famous preacher, Segneri accused preachers of pretending to be philosophers, physicians, lawyers, alchemists, astronomers, anatomists, and everything together (“voler comparire or filosofo, or fisico, or legista, or alchemizzatore, or astrologo, or notomista, ed or tutto questo insieme»), this means that there was a real attempt to convey any kind of learning in sermons.

We may wonder how far the images of the *imprese sacre* realize a philosophy of direct communication addressed to an ethics based on the apprehension of natural models. That is to say, are these symbolic images justified only by the principle that what enters in the human mind through the ears is less powerful than what enters through eyes (a principle already stated in classical rhetoric, by Orace and Cicero)? Or is this supported by the conviction that the perception of an image that symbolically represents a natural being grasps the ontological reason of the being represented? Therefore, can we state that there is in these images of natural things a kind of naturalism; that is to say, that the use of natural images allows us to draw principles of action before reasoning, that it functions as a model of behaviour? As a consequence can we affirm that the symbolic image acts as a filter through which to offer an interpretation of the world?

Generally the idea of the expressivity of nature as a source of moral advice is situated in the Enlightenment. Can we infer from the *imprese* and the few other

homiletic texts we have seen and discussed that there is a search for moral direction to be drawn directly from natural beings, surpassing literary scripture not available to everyone, not only because of a lack of literacy but also because of the impossibility for Catholic individuals to use Sacred Scriptures independently?

Sacred oratory, after the Council of Trent, was supposed to create a new ethics for Catholics. Against the dogmatism derived from the impossibility of discussing matters of faith (Galileo's case teaches very well the delicacy with which one must deal with the Bible), some ecclesiastics seem to have a different attitude. Even Cardinal Bellarmino in his book *De Ascensione mentis in Deo per scala rerum creatarum* seems to suggest that nature can be used for learning about God.

These ecclesiastics, who are still tied to the humanistic tradition, try to offer the congregation autonomous ways for building a personal ethics, a personal conscience. Federico Borromeo considered his collection of pictures of still lifes as a means for spiritual peace, nature offers to everyone suggestions regarding morality. The book of nature, as in Medieval times, can represent an infinite and easily accessible source of meditation and can help to fire that spark of moral conscience that remains within human beings, even after the original fall.

The idea that in human conscience there exists a small part capable of distinguishing truth, even in a sinful condition, was a common element of the scholastic view of the human being. Synderesis, or the *scintilla conscientiae* or *instinctus naturae*, according to the *Summa theologiae*, "serves to identify the origin of the basic unpremeditated act of human will, the spontaneous impulse or attraction that follows but is virtually identical with man's perception of the good" (Greene, *Instinct of Nature: Natural law, Synderesis, and the Moral Sense*, 183). The

natural *instinctus boni* is not an object of the will, but assists everyone in need of it. This natural instinct forms the basis for natural law, and goes on to interact with the new ethical issues arising at the end of the century. At the time it was in use as a result of the new scholasticism but also because of a need for new ethical imagination. Although the moral autonomy of the individual in Catholic countries was denied, a need for it was largely felt.

In some way, the natural observations made in symbolic images could help to recognize and strengthen the natural instinct for the good. The representation of vicious attitudes by monsters and good attitudes by beautiful flowers and animals, is a direct message that surpasses words and goes directly to the conscience, reinforcing the spark of good in mankind.

Among these representations we find also certain professionals as they conduct their daily duties, such as bishops, preachers, friars, and even laymen in secular professions, such as a judge, a lawyer, a soldier, a physician, a notary, and a trader. These were the most practiced professions at the time, the first of a real bourgeois society. It seems that there is here the effort to provide rules for a professional life, of inventing a model for living in a modern society, and applying Christian precepts to contemporary life.

The characters which emerge from the *imprese sacre* are very close to those of Aesop's fables. The fable derives its moral lesson from animal behaviour, it is a narrative invention which tells a story reproducing human vicissitudes. For example, the French *Fables d'Esop Phrygien traduites et moralisées* par Jean Baudoin, published in 1631, and very popular in Europe at the time, is very similar to the *imprese* by Paolo Aresi, even though Aresi in 1631 had already completed his collection. Even Tesauro in his *Cannocchiale aristotelico* defines the fable or apologue as a form of emblem as it has words

and images aiming both at the same significance. A fable is, above all according to Tesauro, a metaphor (Metafora di proporzione continuata) as well as an emblem.

But the main difference is that even in the short poems added by Aresi to the images there is not a story. The *imprese* concentrate on allegory, where the message hidden or veiled is immediately perceived by means of the image. In the fable there is a story, in the *impresa* all the features are included in the image, the past and present, allegory and morality. The image is the sign for revealing the whole encyclopedia related to the elements, including the new discoveries. The renovated gaze towards the cosmos and the globe, associated with a metaphysical dimension could suggest new emblems to be used for ethical communication.

Preaching represented not only an instrument for ideological uniformity, for control of individual and collective behaviour, and for religious instruction, but it also became an instrument of cultural mediation, a mass media for a mainly illiterate population. Even educated people could find in homilies a reflection of the most updated debates which could satisfy their search for novelties and erudition, to some extent. For Aresi, there was no difference between educated or ignorant members of the congregation. For this reason too, the preacher was a key figure in seventeenth century society and preaching was a greatly anticipated social event.

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