In his 1662 *Art des emblèmes*, the French Jesuit Claude-François Ménestrier, a master in *ars symbolica*, explains what religious emblems are:

> The Sacred [emblems] are those that under borrowed or symbolic figures contain the maxims of Religion and its mysteries. As are all the figures of the Prophecies and the Apocalypse, the stories of the Old Testament, which are the figures of the New, and the ceremonies of the ancient Law, when they are turned to good use for the instruction of the Christian maxims. Holy Scripture is at the origin of these emblems, and however ingenious the pagan philosophy seems, it has never yielded symbols as noble as those of the Holy Scriptures [...].

According to Ménestrier, the Bible is not only a reservoir for emblems, but more importantly to us, its exegetical structure is in essence emblematic. In other words, the figurative model of emblematics, its signifying process, is given by the structural principles of biblical exegesis. As a consequence, the emblem is turned into a key hermeneutical device constitutive of the process of visual exegesis. Moreover, the emblem entertains a transcendent relationship with the biblical text, as Ménestrier states further on:

> We represent in emblems divine perfection without idolatry and if we make images, it is not in order to worship them but, through enigmatic and symbolic figures, to learn to know God in his creatures without ascribing to him the defects that they have.
The argument is of course reminiscent of the polemics against iconoclasm, and implicitly elicits the notion of an original or model, that is, the notion of a *prototype*. It is an established fact that one of the main theological arguments marshaled in defence of images consists in referring worship to the prototype – the referent of the image – thanks to the *transitus* of the beholder’s gaze toward this referent. So, if emblems grant us access to God in the same way as sacred figures do, and if the Holy Scripture is their model, then emblems and sacred text are related to each other in both a relation of imitation and one of interpretation, or rather, in a relation of imitation through interpretation. But this also and above all implies a transcendent relation between the two, the reading of the emblem being a transitive reading toward the model discourse of its referent, that is, of the sacred text, exactly as the prototype is in a relation to the image that represents it. This transfer of scriptural figures into an emblematic context, onto which one superimposes the figurative rules of the emblems, institutes this transcendent relation at the level of the figures of speech, given the fact that a metaphor (sometimes a metonymy) is always at the heart of any emblem.4 This shift is clearly achieved by another Jesuit, Maximilien Van der Sandt (or Sandaeus), who elaborated a full-fledged theory of biblical emblematics in his *Theologia symbolica* in 1626.5 Sandaeus developed a long argument from which one can deduce that the symbolism of things (*allegoria in factis*) boils down to the symbolism of words (*allegoria in verbis*), and more specifically to a *modus loquendi*, whose aim is to decipher the mystery of God – in accordance with the general definition of symbols – but with the consequence that everything has become *allegoria in verbis*.6 Pushing this rhetorical line to

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5 Van der Sandt Maximilien (or Sandaeus), *Theologia symbolica ex omni antiquitate sacra, ac profana in Artis formam redacta, Oratoribus, Poëtis, & universe Philologis, ad omnem commoditatem amoenae eruditionis concinnata* (Mainz, Johann Theobald Schönwetter: 1626).